THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGIOUS FORMATION TO CELIBATE LIVING - A PSYCHOSEXUAL ANALYSIS OF LAY CONSECRATED PERSONS

DORIENNE PORTELLI

Research undertaken in the Department of Counselling, Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta

Master in Counselling

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THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGIOUS FORMATION TO CELIBATE LIVING - A PSYCHOSEXUAL ANALYSIS OF LAY CONSECRATED PERSONS

DORIENNE PORTELLI

A dissertation submitted in part-fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Malta for the Degree of Master in Counselling

Research undertaken in the Department of Counselling, Faculty for Social Wellbeing.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the meanings and experiences which six lay consecrated persons have constructed regarding the formation they received in relation to their understanding and living of consecrated celibacy in the world. A psychosexual analysis was used to shed further light on this relationship. The study adopts Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a methodological approach. The data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The following five main themes emerged from the analysis of the data: (a) perception of the institution as a forming and a sustaining structure, (b) the experience of choice, loss and mourning, (c) dealing with ongoing challenges, (d) life as an important instructor, (e) aids towards authentic celibate living. The participants described their experiences of initial and on-going formation as providing a supporting and sustaining structure necessary for celibate living. They related how life experience becomes the main instructor for celibate living, linking the formation provided with the evolution of their meaning and understanding of celibacy. Participants felt that a personal encounter with a spiritual director helps them live through several experiences of loss linked to a celibate choice and other life challenges. Cultivating a profound relationship with Jesus Christ and valuing relationships within their groups become a source of support for celibate living.

Keywords: celibacy; formation; formator-formee relationship; psychosexual.
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List of Abbreviations

Church Documents

CCL - Code of Canon Law
CICLSAL - Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life
FSI - Formation in Secular Institutes (1980 Document)
PDV - Pastores Dabo Vobis
PI - Potissimum Institutionis
PME - Provida Mater Ecclesia
Ratio - Formation Program
VC - Vita Consecrata
DEDICATION

To my parents, Victor and Maria,

and sisters, Jahel and Deborah.
I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Rev. Dr. Paul Galea for his invaluable feedback and support throughout the study. A word of thanks goes to my advisor Dr. Claudia Psaila for her professional support.

Special thanks go to the six participants who accepted the invitation to take part in this research. I am grateful for their availability and openness to reflect upon their experience.

Finally, I am indebted to my family and friends, whose encouragement, support and prayers carried me throughout this project.
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “The Relevance of Religious Formation to Celibate Living - A Psychosexual Analysis of Lay Consecrated Persons” is an original study carried out by myself and the conclusions drawn herein are a result of my own research, unless otherwise acknowledged by citation.

Dorienne Portelli

25th May 2014
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

My heart warms up as my mind recalls the sound of the joyful laughter on Sunday afternoons, wandering along pathways in the countryside with my friends. A vivid image emerges - a beaming lay consecrated woman living her entire existence as an offering, accompanying young people throughout their life journey. Her total self-giving, sustained by what my friends and myself perceived as inner freedom, left its mark. I became engaged with her being, and a loving rapport was established - a love seemingly emanating from her strong attachment with Love (God), as well as a vibrant relationship with her own humanity. Fascinated by this early encounter, I secretly developed a curiosity to get to know more about celibate living. This interest presumably sowed the seed for what was later to flower into a personal involvement in the inner chamber of these persons and, later on, the choice of my dissertation title.

For believers in Jesus Christ, Christianity is not a philosophy or an ideology, but a personal encounter with Jesus - God made man. Throughout the centuries, persons opted to pledge their life to Jesus who became their fundamental and ultimate raison d’etre, their philosophy of life. One of the earliest, Paul of Tarsus, thus describes himself:

“What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him…” (Phil. 3:8-10 New International Version).
For Paul, choosing celibacy was the consequence of an intense religious experience—his fascinating encounter with Jesus when on his way to Damascus (Acts. 9:1-19).

Nurturing a desire to delve deep into the “mystery” (Imoda, 2005) of persons called to live celibacy “for the sake of furthering the Kingdom of God” (Gallagher & Vandenberg, 1987, p.3) whilst remaining in the world, I became familiar with the teachings of the Church on lay consecration. Pope Pius XII (1947) officially recognised lay associations of consecrated persons through the promulgation of the *Apostolic Constitution for Secular Institutes, Provida Mater Ecclesia* (PME) which accentuated the synthesis of consecration and secularity, that is, living in the world. Thus, the main distinguishing characteristic from the traditional and well-known forms of religious life is that members of Secular Institutes live their consecration whilst remaining in the world (PME, 1947, para.13).

I gradually came to an understanding that consecrated celibacy is “an attitude of life that strikes at the root of every human relationship, of every relationship with God” (Chittister, 1999, p.67). Following Radcliffe (1999) I consider that “the nature of celibacy is about love, meaning and freedom” (p.67). Along the years, I became engaged in intense conversations with friends and colleagues in an attempt to clarify the value of celibacy frequently mistaken for a mere sexual abstinence, and “often confused with the negation of sex” (Slater, 2011, p.197). I am inspired by Slater’s (2011) assertion that celibacy “is about the full growth of the human being beyond passion, beyond enslavement to personal appetites, beyond narcissism to a life that gives priority, not to the self, but to the very meaning of life... it is another way of loving” (p.197). Being an educator by profession, the idea of a celibate person striving
to achieve “full growth” ignited an ardent interest in the area of human and spiritual formation. I began to question what factors might have contributed to this woman’s inner freedom and to her ability for selfless love.

As this lay consecrated woman shaped my world-view and contributed to the moulding of my inner being, I felt some responsibility to give my humble contribution to this minority group. Moving close to my own and others’ amalgam of human splendour and fragility, motivated me to seek formation sources for my own personal and professional development. This paved the way for my involvement in the religious and human formation processes of persons called to embrace priesthood and consecrated life, both as a formator and in an accompanying role, further shaping the interpretative framework which I am seeking to describe. I am aware that this framework has influenced the moulding of my research question and marks my analysis (Coyle, 2007; Storey, 2007). Moreover it has unavoidably made an impact on the manner findings were co-constructed together with my research participants, given my contextual constructionism stance. An important paradigm shift during the research process was an emerging critical spirit which started challenging my acquired identifications, as well as an increased awareness of the possible restrictiveness culture imposes upon myself (Crotty, 1998).

Inspired by Cencini’s (1994a) remark that “if one wishes to carry out an in-depth research on the quality of the celibate witness and experience, it is indispensable to take into consideration the type of formation for celibacy in houses of formation”, I decided to embark on this study (p.87). It was my intention to explore meanings and experiences participants have regarding the formation they
received in relation to their understanding of and living consecrated celibacy in the world. I wished to listen to participants’ personal experiences and strive to “understand” and “make sense of” the phenomenon being studied (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p.54). This explains my choice of methodology i.e. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

In the following chapter I will present a review of the relevant literature, starting with an outline of my epistemological stance by referring to a chosen anthropological framework and linking it to psychology. Chapter three illustrates the methodology, while chapter four highlights the themes emerging from the data. A discussion of the main findings proceeds. Finally, I shall make some recommendations for future research and put forward some suggestions concerning counsellor training, practice and supervision.
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The object of this chapter is to discuss literature that could enable a deeper theoretical understanding of celibacy and formation, and of the latter’s relevance to celibate living. Moreover, I will outline my epistemological stance using the anthropological framework that best describes my own theoretical assumptions and background. Given the vast amount of literature on this topic, I will also be using my own journey of formation as a limiting criterion in my choice of works presented in this chapter. This will then be linked with psychology, in an effort to provide a solid background and context for the research. I am choosing a psychodynamic approach as this seems to be mostly evidenced in literature concerning psychology and religious formation.

I am inspired by the anthropological framework proposed by Rulla (1985), a Jesuit and a psychiatrist, for the purpose of formation for the Christian vocation. “It considers man in his relationship with the divine other and, accordingly, with values that lead to union with God” (Costello, 2002, p.192). In a time when hostility between religion and the human sciences was substantial (Couturier, 2008), Rulla (1985) and Rulla, Imoda and Ridick (2001) aspired to know “what motivated people as they tried to live out their religious ideals, what sustained them on their vocational journeys, and what helped or hindered the appropriation and internalization of their religiously-based values” (Couturier, 2008, p.21).
They elaborate a theory of self-transcendent consistency, striving to obtain a broader and more realistic vision of human freedom. According to the authors, one can understand the Christian vocation as the free call of God to the human person to become a partner in the New Covenant. God’s calling, however, never falls on neutral ground but meets two anthropological dimensions of the human personality and nature. The first dimension refers to the ability of the human person for theocentric self-transcendence - human’s capacity to go beyond oneself and reach to God as the ultimate goal. This dimension engages the person to become challenged to live according to moral and religious values. The second anthropological dimension acknowledges the various limitations inherent in human nature. These can, in some way or another, hinder the freedom of movement toward theocentric self-transcendence. Rulla (1985) investigated these two anthropological dimensions according to three foundations - philosophical, theological and psychological. Their influence on the Christian vocation was studied. This anthropology could offer an effective help in decreasing personal limitations brought about by lack of freedom, especially those emerging from unconscious hindrances.

“At the core of this theory of self-transcendent consistency is the belief that the human person is made for God; we are created in the image and likeness of the Triune God” (Couturier, 2008, p.24). The anthropological starting point of this theory is markedly different from other schools of psychology, in that it holds a religious ground and thus “a positive view of the person’s reach and need for the divine” (Couturier, 2008, p.24). Couturier argues on how Freud’s theory of psychological development is noticeably lay and atheistic. It brings forth a boundless distinction
between the human person and the divine, humanity and creation, “by reducing the call to transcendence to the projection of mere instincts” (Couturier, 2008, p.24). Freud’s works on the nature of religion appears to have provoked his most reductive and unbending tendencies (DiCenso, 1991). He claimed the discovery that “we create our own gods from the apparently simple warp and woof of our everyday life” (Rizzuto, 1979, p. 5). Throughout his life, considerable work was thus focused towards unveiling what he perceived as the illusory character of religious beliefs and practices (Ross, 2001).

Although Freud’s views of religion unavoidably influenced psychoanalytic theorists in taking a cautious attitude towards religion (Rizzuto, 1979), Winnicott, while only marginally dealing with religious experience, is prominent in the psychology and religion interchange. An object relations theorist, Winnicott’s distinguished contribution is the idea of a transitional object, “an intermediate area of experience between subjective objects and true object relationships” (St Clair, 2004, p.73). He located religion within a “third area of human living” (Winnicott, 1971, p. 2), specifically an “intermediate area of experiencing” (p. 230). This takes place as the child is making the transition between ‘absolute dependence’ and ‘independence’. The image of God which at the outset is grounded in parent relations, can act as a transitional object. This endures as a strong component of one’s internal experience, particularly with regard to the creative and representative capabilities of the transitional space (Banschick, 1992; McDargh, 1986).

According to Ulanov 2001, “Winnicott, researching the transitional spaces of childhood, opens for us the spaces we reconnoitre throughout our whole life, entering
evermore deeply into contact with ultimate reality” (p.6). Schaap-Jonker (2008) refers to how Winnicott (1971) and Ulanov (2001) view “religion as a cultural object belonging to the sphere in between self and other, inner experience and external reality, originality and tradition” (p.53). Furthermore, she elaborates on how Pruyser expounds that “the child’s transitional object precedes and prefigures the transcendent object that is characteristic of the transitional space, which he calls the illusionistic world” (p.52). Pruyser refers to the transitional object as the transcendent object in that it is held as sacred and is treated with “awe and reverence”, as in the case of a blanket or a teddy bear (Leeming, Madden & Marlan, 2009, p.802).

Rizzuto (1979), in her ground-breaking seminal study ‘The Birth of the Living God’, further elaborates on Winnicott’s work in this area. In her conclusions, she claims that Winnicott was correct in “locating religion - and God - in what he called transitional space” (p.209). Disagreeing with Freud’s consideration of God and religion, she asserts that “reality and illusion are not contradictory terms” and that “psychic reality cannot occur without that human transitional space for play and illusion” (p. 209). She purports on how every developmental stage includes transitional objects suitable for age and level of maturity of the person and the type of illusion we choose, whether science, religion, or something else, “reveals our personal history and the transitional space each of us has created between his objects and himself to find ‘a resting place’ to live in” (p.209). Rizzuto maintains that if the God representation is not reviewed to keep in stride with the changes in one’s self-
representation, it “becomes asynchronous and is experienced as ridiculous or irrelevant, or on the contrary, threatening or dangerous” (p. 200).

In the first part of the chapter, I shall focus on definitions of celibacy and formation. This shall be followed by a discussion on the evolvement of the concept of formation for celibacy within the Catholic Church, furthered by the inclusion of a human, psychological perspective in formation stances. The role and qualities of the formator will then be elaborated on and a brief presentation of the formee ensues.

The second part of the literature review concerns the life of the persons choosing to live celibacy. It is an attempt at portraying four areas of celibate living which literature on formation deems particularly imperative. I am however aware that, due to the fact that the study of living celibacy is multifaceted, this literature review is far from being all-encompassing.

Respecting anonymity of participating Institutes, I shall be referring to Ratio/s, that is, formation programmes inspired by the specific charism of a Congregation or Institute, collectively.

2.2. Defining Celibacy and Formation

The practice of celibacy is not confined to the Catholic Church. It is also practiced in other religions, particularly in Buddhism, the Brahma Kumaris and Hinduism, where the vow of brahmacarya (celibacy) is observed. Several lay definitions refer to celibacy as the “state of not being married” and an “abstention
from sexual intercourse.” Deriving from the Latin caelebs - a single unmarried person - the Modern Catholic Dictionary defines celibacy as,

“The state of being unmarried and, in Church usage, of one who has never been married. Catholicism distinguishes between lay and ecclesiastical celibacy, and in both cases a person freely chooses for religious reasons to remain celibate” (Celibacy, para. 1).

In his book Celibacy in Crisis, Sipe (2003) discusses his deeply-contemplated, self-constructed definition of celibacy as having seven essential interrelated elements:

“a freely chosen dynamic state, usually vowed, that involves an honest and sustained attempt to live without direct sexual gratification in order to serve others productively for a spiritual motive” (p.32). I chose this definition motivated by the comprehensive realism in which Sipe elaborates on the chosen elements. Sipe’s elaborations are generally experiential and refer to a process rather than to a stagnant state of being. Referring to ‘freely chosen’, the author elaborates on how this freedom “requires knowledge of one’s embodiment… It requires sexual realism and self-determination” (p.33). Pondering on the ‘dynamic state’ of this choice, Sipe suggests that “the process is to become a celibate, not just be a celibate.” He elucidates on how “growth and development - require adaptation and new coping mechanisms” (p.33). Denoting ‘usually vowed’, Sipe discusses the influential effect such willingness to give up sexual pleasure has on both believers and non-believers. Living the vow involves making ‘an honest and sustained attempt’ to dwell on daily experiences, this calling for “balance, self-knowledge, consistency and commitment”
Living celibacy implies going ‘without direct sexual gratification’. Whilst acknowledging that sexual pleasure is “a necessary component of their personal growth”, Sipe reflects on how “many of the joys of life and truly meaningful interactions do not involve direct sexual gratification” (p.37). The sixth element focuses on how meaning is given to celibacy through ‘serving others productively’, so that the vow is “perceived as valuable and worth the sacrifice” (p.38). Referring to the gift of grace, the last element referred to is the ‘spiritual motive’. Sipe iterates that “only a love that can match or exceed what is possible with sexual love can sustain celibacy” (p.41).

Etymologically derived from the Latin verb formare, formation means “to mould”. Although possessing similar implications, the word formation in our context is different from “education,” “instruction” and “learning”’ (De Souza, 2007, p.92). The author iterates that formation goes beyond these three concepts and “its scope is a much more engaging notion both on the part of the formator, as well as on the part of the one in formation” (p.92). According to Mannath (2012), in a setting of a vocation to consecrated life, formation is the process of introducing the candidate into the life and mission of a religious commitment.

In Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes, Potissimum Institutioni (PI) (1990), referring to a formation program, the document states that,

“The primary end of formation is to permit candidates to the religious life and young professed, first, to discover and, later, to assimilate and deepen that in which religious identity consists. Only under these conditions will the person
dedicated to God be inserted into the world as a significant, effective, and faithful witness” (p.6)

Literature refers both to initial and ongoing formation, the latter being given increased attention in the past decades mainly due to the increasing life-span and the “rapidity of change in so many areas of life” (Mannath, 2012, pp.717-718). “The ongoing formation of religious is understood as the constant personalization or interiorization of Christ’s life. Consequently it is a learning process, which involves change, growth and the transformation of the person” (De Souza, 2007, p.93).

Referring to formation being ongoing as from the initial periods of entry into consecrated life, De Souza (2007) asserts on how new stages in the consecrated person’s life bring forth “new responsibilities” and a “re-reading of one’s personal life” (p. 94).

2.2.1. Formation for Celibacy

Formation for consecrated celibacy is a lifelong commitment for an exclusive relationship with Christ. This enduring factor distinguishes formation for celibacy from abstinence programs promoted both in the field of sexual health where a multitude of school curriculum-based programs are drawn “in an effort to reduce unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases STD” (Kirby, 2008, p.18), as well as to multi-prolonged interventions seeking the promotion and willingness of teens and youth to adhere to Christian teachings of sexual chastity before marriage (Mbotho, Cilliers & Akintola, 2013).
The concept of formation for consecrated life evolved gradually over the last century. Decades before the Second Vatican Council, specifically through the decree *Quo Efficacius* of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, dated 24th January 1944, the Church expressed its concern for the formation of religious (PI, 1990, p.2). Religious Congregations and Secular Institutes embrace the challenge of *Vita Consecrata* (VC) (1996, p.68) in drawing up a *Ratio Institutionis*, clearly listing the stages of initial and ongoing formation necessary for a candidate to totally conform to the spirituality of the corresponding Institute. Moreover, the role of the formator, subsequently elaborated on, has been given due importance. Several courses for formators have been established to ensure an improvement in quality of service. *Ratios*, as well as relevant literature, indicate that formation is a delicate process of translating theory into an application of the lived experience of the person aspiring for consecrated life.

Formation programs for consecrated life constitute a frame of reference so that each member’s vocation grows in quality (Ratio SDB, 2000 p.56).

The *Plenaria of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes* (1978) mentions the importance of spiritual and human formation for consecrated persons which can ensure a “mature presence... capable of renewed relationships” (p.33). John Paul II, in VC (1996), asserts that formation programs should integrate all aspects of the consecrated person’s life. Formation content and process bears in mind “the character of wholeness” thus “involving the whole person, in every aspect of the personality, in behaviour and intentions” providing for “a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation” and “aiming at the transformation of the whole person” (p.65). John Paul II (2000) whilst acknowledging
the importance of the “analysis and reflections of sociology and other human sciences” in formation content and process, stresses the centrality of the “spiritual, theological and sapiential dimension of the life of faith” which, the Pope underlines, should grant “the ultimate and decisive keys to reading today’s human condition and for choosing priorities and authentic life styles” (p.2).

2.2.2. *The Inclusion of a Psychological Perspective in Formation*

Psychology as an aid and tool for human formation in consecrated life was discounted before the *Second Vatican Council*. The *Council* includes three documents specifying the need of dealing with affective maturity in formation for celibacy being the *Decree on the Training of Priests - Optatam Totius* (1965), the *Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life - Perfectae Caritatis* (1965), and the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests - Presbyterorum Ordinis* (1965). From then onwards, several Church documents mention psychology and human formation themes in reference to formation for celibacy both for the priesthood and consecrated life. Of particular mention is John Paul II’s *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (1992) a post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the formation of priests, which holds a compelling mention of the need for human formation so that priests possess qualities to be able to relate to others and achieve the affective and sexual maturity “needed for them to be balanced people, strong and free, capable of bearing the weight of pastoral responsibilities” (p.43).
I choose to briefly examine PI (1990) as it portrays clear directives on religious formation. Expounding on the vow of chastity, this document refers to *Perfectae Caritatis* which stresses the fact that “candidates ought not to go forward, nor should they be admitted, to the profession of chastity except after really adequate testing, and unless they are sufficiently mature, psychologically and affectively” (p.13).

Listing aims for a pedagogy of consecrated chastity, the document includes “giving basic notions on masculine and feminine sexuality, with their physical, psychological and spiritual connections” and “helping in matters of self-control, on the sexual and affective level” (p.13). Referring to the candidate’s admission into consecrated life, the document mentions “a balanced affectivity, especially sexual balance” (p.43). A “psychological examination” to determine the needs of the candidate is considered useful at this stage (p.43). The document expresses concern to the fact that “there is frequently a gap between the level of [candidates’] secular knowledge, which can be highly specialised at times, and that of their psychological growth and their Christian life” (p.88). This gap needs to be acted on during formation stances. A significant mention is given to the achievement of human maturity throughout the course of consecrated life.

As mentioned earlier on, the indications given by Church authorities are translated into *Ratios* drawn up by the respective Congregations and Institutes. According to *Ratios* pertaining to participants’ Institutes, formation must be comprehensive, comprising of and sustained by all facets - human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. This might trigger a shift from a traditionalist conceptual framework of forming mainly through the consideration of the spiritual dimension,
possibly giving rise to spiritualisation, repression and denial, towards an elaboration of formation programmes taking the human being in their totality, and incorporating the aid of the human sciences.

A main objective denoted by *Ratios* is the creation of a basic fundamental attitude of getting deeply in touch with oneself. This initially matures through a process of self-awareness and self-acceptance, aided by both individual and group formation, enabling the person to become aware of strengths and limitations, and enhancing an aptitude for openness to get to know, to question and to challenge. Another central objective is the development and, presumably the achievement, of psychological-affective maturity enabling the person to establish free, authentic and loving relationships with both sexes. Formators engage in interchanges regarding issues of intimacy and friendships, as well as ways of dealing with solitude. The cultivation of fraternal relationships is widely encouraged as it sustains the celibate heart. A good proportion of *Ratios* give prominence to the discovery of one’s sexuality in their corporeal, psychological and transcendent implications. Some *Ratios* refer to psychological tools as offering a boundless aid to formation in consecrated life, and propose therapy for personal growth during the process of formation.

As previously mentioned, Rulla gave a valid contribution in the field of formation for consecrated life and the priesthood. Although the method in which he conducted his studies has been criticised (Egenolf, 2003) the discovery of the importance of taking into account the unconscious realm of the person during both the assessment phase and the initial and ongoing formation is a precious tool and an eye-opener for those concerned with formation. Egenolf (2003) states that according
to Rulla the “Christian vocation occurs within a fundamental tension or dialectic, shaped by two opposing tendencies: a capacity for self-transcendence fostering human partnership with God, and a limitation on freedom that can impair this partnership” (p.84).

Rulla (1985) refers to the area of limited freedom as the ‘second dimension’ and he iterates that this area is particular for every person and, many-a-time, ‘forgotten’. It is a space in which the formation process and content is to focus and work through. Otherwise, according to Rulla et al. (2001), the person receiving formation is realistically unable of becoming a good recipient of formation due to unconscious hindrances. Formation thus expands the area of freedom by working on the unconscious motivations.

Literature concerning human formation for celibate living is immeasurable. I have mostly identified with Groeschel (1985), Clark (1985), Crosby (1996), Sipe (1996), Ridick (2000), Cencini (1994a, 1994b, 1995, 2002, 2005), Schneiders (1986) and Manuel (2012). These authors emphasise how psychology can be effective in enriching the lives of celibate persons when it is coupled with solid spirituality. Several authors including Kuttianimattathil et al. (2012), Nugent (2000), and Parapully (2012) stress the need for “inner work” through a process of counselling or psychotherapy during which the person works on strengths and targets particular problematic areas of the personality.
2.2.3. The Formator

‘Formator’ refers to the person providing formation within an Institute of consecrated life. ‘Formee’ refers to those being formed. V C (1996) gives particular mention to the “decisive importance” and “profound effect” formation personnel in consecrated life (p.65). P I (1990) clearly outlines the human, spiritual and cultural characteristics pertaining to the formator, as well as the material time available to attend to formees with “inner serenity, availability, patience, understanding, and a true affection” (p.31).

Discussing formation for a meaningful celibate life, Mannath (2012), inspired by John Paul II, states that “the real ‘Formator’ is God” and “human formators are instruments or collaborators in formation” (p.717). Alluding to formators’ key roles, Mannath (2012) describes the latter using three words: “inspire, interact, instruct” (p.721). Cencini (1994a) and Kuttanimattathil et al. (2012) contend that efficacy in the formator-formee relationship ensues when the formator attains adequate affective maturity allowing him or her to live and witness celibacy peacefully. Ezeani (2011) argues that if formators are called to assist others to embrace celibacy in a healthy and integrated manner, they are to get in touch with and discover their own sexuality, thus inspiring an open attitude in those they accompany.

Rulla et al. (2001), Manenti (1988) and Cencini (1994a) explain how formators require skills to identify own areas in personality which they consider weak and having limited freedom. This is meant to avoid the projections of formators’ issues onto formees, as well as to prevent failure in grasping their infantile exigencies. The
acquired self-awareness grants them an ability to discern the presence of internal conflicts and affective immaturities, even unconscious, in formees. This implies formators knowing how to perceive deep motivations and underlying needs and hidden tensions. They support candidates in solving affective issues, or rather, in “assuming a different attitude, more responsible and conscious, being less dependent and thus becoming freer to love God and others” (Cencini, 1994a, p.101). The above-mentioned qualities require specialised training for the formator (Rulla, 1985; Cencini, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c; Manenti, 1988; Kuttianimattathil et al., 2012; Nugent, 2000).

2.2.4. The Formee

Whilst acknowledging the role of formators and their respective organisations, formees remain the main agents of formation. Mannath (2012) draws a comparison with a piece of clay which can be moulded, “but we cannot really ‘form’ a human being” (p.716). This is reiterated by PI (1990) which states that formation is first and foremost the responsibility of the person. PDV (1992) refers to formation as being “ultimately a self-formation. No one can replace us in the responsible freedom that we have as individual persons” (p.69). Describing the psychological, moral and ascetical dimensions of formation, Formation in Secular Institutes (FSI) (1980) implies an experiential orientation yielding benefit from the willingness of the candidate to seek “balance, self-control and openness to others...through continual effort at self-conversion and revision of living witness” (p.37).
The following section focuses on literature concerning formation for specific and interrelated areas of a person’s being.

2.3. **Aspects of Formation to Celibate Living**

2.3.1. **Psychosexual Development and Integration**

Mannath (2012) contends that psychosexual maturity, “becoming a mature, loving, life-giving, joyful man or woman” is a principal task every human being, whether married or celibate, needs to attain (p.502). According to Halperin, as cited in Kuttianimattathil (2012), “sexuality is such a profound and pervasive aspect of our personhood that we cannot really understand ourselves apart from our sexuality” (p.25). Halperin contends that “sexuality holds the key to unlocking the deepest mysteries of the human personality: it lies at the centre of the hermeneutics of the self” (p.26).

Freud (1952) in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* delineates five stages in which psychosexual development takes place - the Oral, Anal, Phallic, Latency and Genital Stages. Observing adults, Freud (1952) understood how behaviour is driven by instinctual impulses and desires that originate in the initial phases of an infant’s life. He explains how at each stage, one part of the body becomes the focus of attention and neurosis and disorders in adult life are caused by ineffective solutions obtained for negative experiences during one or other psychosexual stages (Gross as cited in Jeyaraj, 2012). These unresolved issues, or developmental tasks not
accomplished, give rise to fixations and have several implications for formation and consecrated life (Jeyaraj, 2012).

Jeyaraj (2012) explicates how “psychosexual development is the development of an individual’s sexuality as affected by biological, cultural, and emotional influences from prenatal life onwards throughout life” and is intertwined with psychosocial development (p.147). He discusses how this development is progressive. Thus, the person cannot aim to achieve psychosexual integration without attaining qualities required in previous stages. Putting forth an example, the author explains how adolescent years’ problems such as compulsive masturbation might resurface during middle adulthood if not dealt with adequately. The author also argues on how development is possibly conditioned by family background, childhood upbringing, parents’ personality and cultural traditions.

When discussing the nature of a healthy psychosexual development, Cavanagh (2008) mentions four dimensions: the cognitive, where positive attitudes towards sexual behaviour in regard of body, gender and growth are nurtured and assumed; the emotional, which includes feeling comfortable, confident, and competent about own body and sexuality as well as with that of the opposite sex; the social, referring to unrestrained, open and possibly reciprocally-fulfilling relationships with same and opposite sex; and a moral dimension describing the prevention of destructive expression of one’s sexuality. Where development is inhibited or unhealthy, these four qualities are deficient or else developed in a destructive direction. Cavanagh explicates on how such development infrequently follows a flowing path and whilst delayed development seems better than fixation, it creates considerable problems.
Cencini (1994a) refers to the affective-sexual area as specifically requiring individual attention and treatment. He explains that, due to the fact that a great deal of shame and immaturity seem to surround it, it risks remaining not addressed. It is only in a “qualified” creation of a formator-formee relationship of trust that the latter is able to share intimate desires regarding sexuality and affection. Whilst acknowledging that formation within a group could benefit the formee, it “does not offer the conditions of secrecy and confidentiality which are fundamental requisites for the manifestation of that which is strictly personal” (p.99). Referring to the likelihood of midlife crises in consecrated life, Parappully (2012) and Cencini (2010) propose that initial formation programs include aspects regarding life in the middle years, particularly in terms of “the re-awakening of sexuality and intimacy needs” (2012, p.492).

Highlighting the importance of personalised formation, Nugent (2000) refers to structured meetings with the Spiritual Director who can act as guide and model of sexual integration, as well as with the formator “with whom students are expected to articulate their understanding of celibate chastity and their readiness for such a commitment” (p.75). He also commends professional counselling services to candidates for consecrated celibacy.

2.3.2. Repression versus Sublimation

In an attempt at constructing a definition of repression, Holmes (1990) drawing from Freud, believes that the general use of the concept of repression is,
“the selective forgetting of materials that cause the individual pain, is not under voluntary control, and repressed material is not lost but instead is stored in the unconscious and can be returned to consciousness if the anxiety that is associated with the memory is removed” (p.86).

Sublimation is defined by Horowitz as cited in Holmes (1990), as

“the process whereby one replaces an unacceptable wish with a course of action that is similar to the wish but does not conflict with one’s value system. For example, aggressive wishes may be sublimated into working hard to fight against and solve social problems” (p.82).

Nugent (2000) expounds on how sexuality needs to be experienced “as a positive gift rather than as a dangerous power to be feared, denied, suppressed, or controlled rather than channelled” (p.72). Chittister (2000) argues that, “if chastity requires the repression of sex for its own sake, the world does not need it” (para.1), whilst Mannath (2012) insists that, “what is required in the area of sexuality is integration, not repression, denial or rejection” (p.502).

D’Sa and Pereira (2012) referring to counter indications of maturity, argue on how a “controlled person” is often seen as mature and responsible. However “such control is often rooted in repression and later characterised by rigidity, over-seriousness, robot-like behaviour, and loss of empathy for others” (p30). They postulate that a continuous process of self-awareness, self-understanding and self-acceptance could help candidates in formation make healthy choices according to personal feelings and needs. “Instead of repressing these, we can express them verbally, act on them or choose to suppress them for meaningful motives” (p.39). Sipe
(2003) claims that repression and denial support a human being in unopposed celibacy for long periods of time. His experience suggests that this is particularly frequent among persons who are academically successful and duty bound towards the institution. “Having kept all the rules of that system, the men were surprised and felt sabotaged by the force of their internal fire... when at some future time the floodwaters of adolescence break through their dam of repression” (p.64-65).

Sipe (2003) explains that the “core of celibacy” necessitates sublimation, thus “the sexual instinct of the celibate is diffused and directed to the service of other pursuits” (p.37). Deprivation devoid of a social or community objective “is meaningless and probably not possible” (p.38). A healthy sublimation facilitating celibate living requires the discovery and acknowledgment of,

“an unquenchable fire, a restlessness, a longing, a disquiet, a hunger, a loneliness, a gnawing nostalgia, a wildness that cannot be tamed, a congenital all-embracing ache that lies at the centre of human experience and is the ultimate force that drives everything else” (Rolheiser, 1999, p.4).

Rolheiser (1999) asserts how spirituality is concerned with “what we do with the fire inside of us, about how we channel our eros...” (p.4). Mannath (2001) referring to this ‘channelling’, reflects on how celibate formation requires helping candidates to keep their enthusiasm alive whilst remaining whole and not disintegrating. Channelling sexual energy by dedicating oneself to and loving humankind is described by Mannath as “celibacy’s charm” and is exemplified by celibate role models.
2.3.3. **Consequences of Sexual Abstinence - Loss and Mourning**

The term mourning refers to the ubiquitous experience of various forms of loss. “Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (Freud, 1917, p.243). This painful and time consuming process “is completed [when] the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (p.245).

Coming to terms with the loss of “living without direct sexual gratification” entails a mourning process. One of the eight characteristics mentioned by Coleman (2003) in his description of a healthy celibate is that the person “has adequately grieved what he must leave behind” (p.1). Specifically referring to the vow of chastity, Chaves (2006) iterates that in the modern era, formation to renunciation implies going against the grain. Whilst moving away from rigid formation structures belonging to past decades with a focus on instilling absolute abstinence mechanisms in candidates, Chaves explicates that formation for celibacy today still necessities educating for renunciation. “It is essential to rediscover the human and Christian value of authentic renunciation, to be able to live an experience that is enriching, in a manner that can be taken positively, and which does not lead to nervous frustration” (Chaves 2006, p.13). In fact, renewal and revival are primary objectives of formators and formees willing to take on such painstaking yet freeing mission (Nugent 2000).

Chaves (2006) portrays a phenomenology of renunciation as a possible philosophy underlying a formation standpoint, using the Gospel parable of the
merchant with the precious pearl (Mt. 13:45-46). Firstly, candidates for celibacy understand that renouncing to pearls is challenging. Not acknowledging the preciousness of the foregone pearls becomes dissonant and unrealistic. Nugent (2000) aptly portrays how “a healthy celibate has learnt to grieve the loss of genitality, of conjugal love, and fatherhood” (p.73). Such mourning process paves the way for celibate maturity and total self-giving (Nugent, 2000). Secondly, the merchant renounces the pearls to buy the precious pearl. If the latter pearl, i.e., choosing celibacy for the Kingdom, is not appealing, abstaining becomes unreasonable and humanly unbearable. Thirdly, fear shall always accompany the buyer of the pearl who is never absolutely sure with regard to its authenticity. A false “acquisition” ruins one’s life. Chaves (2006) states that faith is directly linked to renunciation, and a risk-factor accompanies all in consecrated life. In my opinion, another type of fear could be that of having expended and risked all possessions for the purpose of buying one single pearl. In several instances in his writings, Cencini (2010) mentions a risk zone seemingly permeating the life of the celibate. This zone is characterised by some needs that, notwithstanding a good enough understanding of the renunciations the celibate choice implies, remain frustrated and “there will always be a certain unsatisfied longing” (p.17). Fourthly, Chaves highlights the importance of renunciation to experiences, especially in the affective and sexual areas. He iterates that, while some hold on to the idea of going through several experiences prior to deciding, he argues that trying all paths is not possible.
2.3.4. Emotional Maturity and Intimacy

The etymology of the word intimacy indicates a derivative of two Latin words - ‘intimus’, referring to that which is most intimate, and ‘intimare’, meaning to make known, announce, impress. A combination of these two meanings reveals a process - “making known that which is innermost” (John & Varkay, 2012, p.75). Goergen (1979) considers intimacy as the highest manner of interpersonal experience - the bonding with another.

Crosby (1996) specifies that authentic intimacy calls for reciprocal disclosure as well as vulnerability in that it involves giving up the need to control. He elaborates on how fear of intimacy might stem out of disowning one’s emotional needs and avoiding relationships which risk becoming dependent or involving a commitment. Risking self-disclosure presumes a level of self-awareness and self-intimacy which consents the person to share oneself (John & Varkay, 2012).

Exploring the facets necessary for affective maturity and intimacy, Mc Clone (2009) focuses on the relational skills necessary to identify, understand and divulge authentic feelings to others, together with the ability to listen, comprehend, and empathise with others’ experiences. Dowrick, as cited in Mc Clone (2009), explains the importance of the “primacy of solitude” in the development of a healthy intimacy. He claims that a relationship with others can only be rewarding when the person has established a good connection with oneself.

Discussing elements essential for celibate achievement, Sipe (2003) asserts that “security is both the father and child of intimacy” (p.312). The author argues that
attaining security is a general human requirement for growth and for acquiring suitable coping mechanisms. Early childhood patterns of attachment and separation to and from the mother are the foundation for security. “The resolution of the process is strong object constancy and the solidification of identity and relationships” (p.312). When the person encounters new challenges to security, this tenacity forms a platform for problem solving and coping skills. As the ‘child’ of intimacy, security is based on the interface of trust, self-disclosure, and shared contentment.

John and Varkay (2012) and Mc Clone (2009) discuss several roadblocks to mature intimacy, which also have implications for formation. Whilst the ability to depend on others’ support is considered beneficial for personal growth, over-dependencies signify a weakness in personal identity. Fear of pain, possibly originating in childhood and other familial experiences, can possibly block the person and ward off connection needed for close relationships. The authors believe that fear of rejection, conflict, failure, and embarrassment are also prevalent obstacles to intimacy and affective maturity.

Classifying four developmental stages of celibacy, Bonnot (1995) places intimate celibacy as the third stage. It takes place between the mid-thirties and late fifties and is similar to Erikson’s intimacy stage. During this period the celibate is challenged to come to terms with “the need to share one’s inner life with other persons for whom one cares and, the consequent desire to enter into intimate companionship with such individuals” (p.20). The author expounds on how, whilst challenging, such intimacy of companionship “enhances the celibate and the quality of his or her celibacy” (p.21). He thus describes the achievement of intimate celibacy
as, “an ability to be a life-sharing friend of others without being married and without violating one’s self-gift to God, either physically or psychologically” (p.21).

2.4. Criticism and Concern for Formation and Celibacy

Beattie (2011) refers to “the psychosexual well-being of priests” as an ethical concern in regard of formation. She suggests that, whilst priests’ formation should target their capability of living celibacy in an expressive rather than a repressive manner, it ought to allow them not “to inflict their own unresolved sexual issues on those for whom they have pastoral responsibility…” (p.230). Speaking about an “integrated Catholicism”, the author describes sacramental theology as “redolent with a sublimated sexuality” and the 2,000-year-old Church as having “never learned to cope well with human sexuality and desire” (p.224). She calls this “a wounded psyche which needs to be healed” and iterates that “theology still has within it a proclivity to violence which too easily cultivates a spirituality of repression, misogyny and sado-masochistic desire” (p. 230).

Collinge (2012) claims that clerical sexual abuse problems have been caused by inadequate psychological screening and inadequate formation programs. In her article, Schuth (2012) discusses how the sexual abuse crisis has helped reshape priestly formation programmes. She claims that candidates in formation need to be comprehensively knowledgeable, not only with regard to the spiritual aspects of celibacy and sexuality, “but also in straightforward, clear language about biological and psychological, social and pastoral dimensions” (para.5). In its 2003 report on
clergy sexual abuse of minors, the *U.S. Bishops' National Review Board* iterates that being a successful celibate implies understanding the meaning and purpose of priestly celibacy. Whenever formation is inadequate, candidates who are most troubled sexually have a higher probability to fail.

Sipe, who is considered to be one of the severest critics of formation for celibacy (Nugent 2000), iterates that “most training programs value and foster naïveté and sexual immaturity” (1995, p.46). Cencini (1994a) and Chaves (2006) claim that, in spite of significant improvement, a great deal of attention is still given to the intellectual dimension without allocating time and space to experience and thus elaborate and own vocational values through “a synthesis between heart and mind” (Cencini, 1994a, p.95).

Sipe (2003) found that “at any one time, two percent of the vowed celibate clergy can be said to have achieved celibacy” (2003, p.301). Sipe describes celibate achievers as those persons who have successfully negotiated every step of celibate development and are “characterologically so firmly established that their state is, for all intents and purposes, irreversible” (p.301). Eight percent of clergy have consolidated celibate practice in spite of past failures, and forty percent practice celibacy but they can possibly regress to sexual practices as well as progress. The other fifty percent are involved in sexual activity of some sort. A 2009 article illustrates his lament on how his toils at understanding religious celibacy have many-a-time not reaped fruit. He calls sexual/celibate education for priests and consecrated life “inadequate and faulty”.
Slater (2012) argues that even though the profession of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience has a special place in the Church, vows “are currently experienced by many as counter-cultural and as negative symbols” (p.280). A rediscovery of the meaning of the vows in the light of a world in transition (Merkle, 1992) leads to a “reconsideration and reformulation” of formation programs if vowed life is “to have any lasting significance in the Church” (p.281). Slater calls for consecrated persons to become more aware of the “imperfections of modern societies” and come to terms with them (p.281). This coming to terms signifies formation for a broad awareness of current cultural ambiguities such as the reality of complex and unstable relationships and the levels of insecurity this brings forth. Consecrated persons are not immune to contracting these diseases (Slater, 2012)

2.5. Conclusion

Consecrated celibacy provokes interest amongst both religious and non-religious persons, since choosing to live celibacy for the Kingdom makes public that which is most private pertaining to the person (Sipe, 2003). When referring to celibacy, Gray (1997) claims that “its embodied idealism and extravagant claim to purity and untouchability are invitations to unearth hypocrisy” (p.141). She says that “the contrast between the ideal and practice of celibacy” has for several decades stimulated countless writers (p.141). Formators struggle for an understanding of how the mentioned contrast might be healed through the bridging of the gap between the ideal and the actual self (Rulla et al., 2001) of the person in vocation. The majority of
studies portray that a process of self-awareness, self-acceptance, and thus, growth, in the area of sexuality is initiated with the help of in-depth psychology. Nevertheless, “no one course or program can teach a person how to be celibate” (Nugent 2000, p.68). As the latter iterates, preparing a candidate for consecrated celibacy involves bringing together numerous disciplines. Referring to living celibacy, Chittister (2000) argues that “It is a long and arduous road, this journey to self-control, self-giving, self-seeing” (para.5).
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will portray the journey I embarked on while gathering and analysing data in an attempt at accomplishing the aim of the study. In agreement with Crotty (1998), I believe that it is important for researchers to be clear about four elements they are adopting, being, epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and method. I shall thus discuss the philosophical underpinnings consolidating the rationale governing my choice of approach, being Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - IPA. I shall also provide a brief explanation of participants and their selection process. Subsequently, I will outline the process concerning the collection of data, followed by an analysis section. Inspired by McLeod’s (2001) “reflexive knowing”, and Finlay’s (2008) insight on “being reflexively-self-aware”, I shall then dwell upon the several progressive stages in my research project. Some ethical considerations shall then pursue. This is followed by a discussion on criteria of credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

3.2. Research Rationale

This dissertation is understandably influenced by my worldview and my manner of constructing meaning. I consider data produced during interviews as being co-constructed together with research participants and often ruminate over the thought
that meaning is not discovered but constructed (Crotty, 1998). As Crotty iterates, “subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning” (1998, p.9). Several objects in the world remain unknown. However, they may be bursting with impending meaning. This meaning would only surface when these objects become consciously engaged with a subject (Crotty, 1998).

My epistemological stance seems rather inclined towards constructionism, more specifically, - being realist in ontology and relativist in epistemology - contextual constructionism. Thus, I am a constructionist within a context because both participants and I bear a history granting us a particular perspective from which we view the world. Dilthey, as referred to in Crotty (1998), acknowledges that a chief source of understanding is “the author’s historical and social context” (p.95). Crotty (1998) insists that we are unescapably observing the world through our cultural perspective and that “our culture brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning and, by the same token, leads us to ignore other things” (p.54). Thus, an emerging critical spirit needs to challenge my acquired identifications and increase awareness of the possible restrictiveness culture imposes upon myself. I thus need to make sure that, as Ortega y Gasset, as cited in Crotty (1998), describes, I do not become bound with ‘masks’ and ‘screens’. The author advises us in favour of engaging with the world, and against ‘living on top of a culture that has already become false” (Ortega y Gasset as cited in Crotty, 1998, p.59).

The main objective of this research is to shed light on the meanings and experiences my participants and myself construct regarding the formation they received in relation to their understanding of and living celibacy. Current literature
on formation and celibate living explicates that the latter has a particular life history for every person: it is an experience to be acknowledged. In view of the nature of the study, the method I choose to employ is qualitative, and more specifically, phenomenological. Qualitative methodologies aim at ‘elucidating the taken-for-granted assumptions by which people navigate their lifeworld’ (Ashworth, 2008, p. 13) and ‘allow a voice to what has previously been unheard’ (Simmonds, 2004, p. 954).

Phenomenology is concerned with the psychological meanings that constitute the phenomenon through the examination and analysis of the lived experiences of the phenomenon (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). This demands utilisation of a qualitative research methodology that is beneficial in honouring participants’ idiosyncratic experience, an experience disadvantaged in both positivist and empirical methods, where the relationship between consciousness and the objects of awareness is not taken into account (Willig, 2008).

The above epistemological stance and theoretical perspective seems to fit in with the specific notions of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. IPA is interested in “seeking to understand peoples’ experiences at a particular point in history” (Shaw, 2010 p.178). As Smith and Osborn (2008) iterate, “the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants” and is “concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself” (p.53). Referring to co-construction of meaning, the authors state that “the research process is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher in that process” (p.53). Conrad (1987) and Storey (2007) refer to this
as the ‘insider’s perspective’. Instead of struggling to bracket the researcher’s beliefs and assumptions about the world, IPA works with and uses them in an attempt to advance understanding of the phenomenon.

Following Smith and Osborn’s (2008) discussion on the word ‘understanding’, I feel my interpretative stance as being more inclined towards “trying to make sense of” the phenomenon being studied (p.54). This does not, however, mean my abandoning any form of identification or empathic understanding of “what it is like, from the point of view of the participants, to take their side” (p.53). I consider this to be a crucial endeavour in IPA - finding a fair balance between an empathic hermeneutic and a critical one (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Smith & Eatough, 2007).

In their paper, Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006), discuss these “two complementary commitments of (IPA): the phenomenological requirement to understand and ‘give voice’ to the concerns of participants; and the interpretative requirement to contextualize and ‘make sense’ of these claims and concerns from a psychological perspective” (p.102). As various authors point out, interpretation can be ‘descriptive and empathic’, with the aim of generating ‘rich experiential descriptions’, yet also critical and questioning ‘in ways which participants might be unwilling or unable to do themselves’ (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.189).

3.3. The Participants

As Smith and Osborne (2008) hold, most IPA researchers employ a relatively small and homogenous sample. They argue around the uselessfulness of “random or
representative sampling”. The authors thus propose that the better manner of exploring and understanding the experience of a particular group of participants is through the use of purposive sampling. According to Smith and Eatough (2007), six to eight participants is suitable and adequate for a post-graduate study, and “provides enough cases to examine similarities and differences between participants” (p.40). I decided to recruit six participants - three male and three female.

In regard of criteria for selection, participants had to be lay consecrated persons, between thirty five and fifty five years of age. They needed to have had professed consecrated celibacy within a particular Institute approved at a Diocesan or Pontifical level, for a minimum of ten years. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, given that my research did not seek to be representative or generalised. I initially contacted a number of Superiors of Lay Institutes asking for permission in regard of the possibility of interviewing some of their members. Superiors wishing to collaborate proposed participation to their members whilst offering an explanation of the dissertation title. I was subsequently supplied with contact numbers and email addresses of members willing to share their experience. Participants were contacted by e-mail and by telephone to fix an appointment.

Upon initial telephone and mail contact, the prospective interviewees were given limited information as to the questions asked or information sought. I did not provide them with the interview schedule before the interview occurred, in order to allow space for their spontaneous thoughts to actually take place without prior thinking or consideration.
We negotiated a meeting place at a convenient time for both them and myself, consistent with recommendations in prevailing literature on qualitative research (e.g. Smith & Eatough, 2007), about facilitating a comfortable and easy process for participants. Five interviews were held in Church Institutions where participants carry out their apostolate activity. One interview was held at the participant’s home. Interviews were held after an informed consent form (Appendix 2) was signed.

I was enthused by the idea of meeting participants and listening to their personal accounts. I was further stimulated by the fact that my pilot study participant was impressively eager to talk about his experiences and was rich in his accounts. The positive impact of my first interview served as a launching pad for subsequent interviews.

In the process of ‘selecting’ participants, my efforts at recruiting nurtured a longing to seek the ‘finest’ possible candidates. By ‘finest’, my fantasy dwells on persons offering the richest of experience. My intention wasn’t necessarily corrupt. However, when discerning which criteria qualify a ‘fine’ consecrated lay person, I came up with the following considerations: “Am I after a sharing of a lived experience in its authenticity or was I looking for persons deemed best in living a vowed life?” I refrained from proposing my intentions to the mentioned Superiors, thus allowing for a natural process of selection to take place.

Albeit my eagerness in recruiting, I was aware of the possibility of a low response rate, given the nature of the topic. My eagerness in regard of recruiting participants and starting the interviews led me to a position where I needed to contain my curiosity and excitement. I became more conscious that my fervour to
know about potential meanings and experiences of celibacy and sexuality, is the result of religion being central to my being-in-the-world.

3.4. **Data Collection**

I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews since such interviews lend themselves to co-constructing data together. As Smith and Eatough (2007) mention, the main reason for this method being seen as “exemplary” for IPA, is that “the researcher is, in real time, in a position to follow up interesting and important issues that come up during the interview” (p.41). As previously mentioned, my study is focused on attaining an account of the individual’s personal perception of their own experiences.

A preliminary interview schedule was drawn up and discussed with my dissertation supervisor. Several proposed modifications to the questions/probes were mainly related to avoiding explicit questioning (Smith & Eatough, 2007) and aiming at open-ended questions. With reference to choice of questions, I was mainly influenced by readings I engaged with in the process of writing up my literature review, courses I attended regarding consecrated celibacy, and my personal relationships with persons professing this vocation. Being aware of my possibly set frame of mind, I made a conscious effort in being open to whatever the participant was willing to share and thus adopting a facilitating role.

I am aware of the fact that semi-structured interviewing follows a continuum from unstructured to structured (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p.41). I felt I had to adhere
to participants’ particular needs in this regard, in that, whilst keeping up a steady conversation was second-nature for some participants, I did experience difficulty in generating data with some participants who were brief in their answers. Thus, whilst I could engage smoothly with some participants, I felt I was more confined to sticking closer to the interview schedule with others.

3.4.1. The Interviews

In pursuit of my objective, I gathered in-depth descriptions of experiences of lay consecrated celibates during digitally-recorded semi-structured interviews. A guiding intention of the interview design was to arrive at these descriptions hoping to gain knowledge and understanding on whether and how the initial and ongoing religious formation processes help research participants become aware of and get in touch with their own sexual being, and live celibately.

This incorporates an attempt to understand the meanings that sexuality and celibacy hold for these lay consecrated persons, as well as an aspiration to kindle reflection into how such meanings came about. I became interested in the possible repercussions such meanings had for their everyday lived experiences. As Smith and Eatough (2007) denote, the researcher nurtures a desire to move into the psychological and social world of the interviewee by allowing him or her to “become an active agent in shaping how the interview goes” (p.42). I tried to allow space for the participant to “speak about the topic with as little prompting as possible” (p.42), to the best of my ability.
Staying with participants’ experience was imperative. The way I chose to go about it was to initially postulate questions requiring a general description of main areas of exploration. This was aimed at getting to meanings and experiences that were closest to their awareness. Subsequent questions invited participants to delve deeper into their own experience of living celibacy. The interview would then follow on from the kind of response they had to my questions, using further probes. Whenever participants started drying up, I would resort to my interview schedule.

I tried learning the interview schedule by heart “so, when it comes to the interview, the schedule acts as a mental prompt” (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p.44). I felt the most intense response to an interview resulted during the pilot study, when I experienced the participant as fully-immersed and open to the experience. During this initial interview I realised that some questions/probes were overlapping and thus needed to be mindful in this regard for successive interviews.

The interviews lasted between forty five minutes and one hour and fifteen minutes. Before introducing the main questions, I asked them to furnish me with a brief account of their vocation history. While this would provide me with an idea of the context they come from, the main intention was that of helping participants feel more comfortable and at ease, with the hope that an affirmative and approachable atmosphere would be established and carried on during the interview (Smith & Eatough, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2008), where potentially more emotional and/or disquieting material could arise.

Consistent with a phenomenological exploration, I tried to abstain from making explicit or leading remarks, and tried to just nudge slightly when I believed I needed
to get more detail or information (Smith & Eatough, 2007). The interviews sometimes
moved on into areas not previously anticipated; however, the participants’ lead was
followed when I felt that what they were expressing was pertinent and enlightening of
the kind of knowledge I was seeking to attain (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

Not all interviews displayed the same level of intensity. However this
statement is dampened by my enthused expectations of results. I was nonetheless
heartened by how most participants thanked me for having ‘allowed’ them to go
through the experience of the interview. This gave me a considerable sense of a deep
desire to first and foremost acknowledge, and share with another human being their
experience of celibacy and sexuality.

During the first three interviews, my anxiety provoked me to follow the
interview schedule quite closely. I feared I would leave out or forget important
themes should I allow participants to take the lead. I was wary about the possibility of
not having access to all “phenomena”. As time went by I became more at ease and
felt I was following the participants more closely. I could better understand where
they were leading, whenever they moved away from my plan. I tried grasping the
underlying psychological nuances. As Smith and Eathough (2007) iterate, “these novel
avenues are the most valuable” (p.44). However, this was not at all clear to me,
especially at the start. I was bound by fear since six interviews seemed too little and
their preciousness captured my fear.
3.5. **Data Analysis**

After carrying out all six interviews, I transcribed them manually in preparation for IPA. I entered the transcription phase only after all interviews were carried out. This allowed me to fully immerse myself in and focus on the participants’ experience and meaning, without being too influenced by previous participants’ elucidations.

In line with Smith and Eatough (2007), I started reading and re-reading interviews so as to acquaint myself with the data, get a ‘feel’ for it, and try to grasp the meanings the participant assigns to the experience. After initial familiarisation, I started taking notes in the left hand margin. Notes consisted mainly of striking thoughts, strong feelings and incisive words. When I felt reasonably confident in regard to my being acquainted with text, I went through the text again and exploiting both text and notes, I used the right hand margin to write down possible themes that could describe the data. I also underlined selections which felt to be predominantly meaningful in participants’ accounts. This process was not plain and straightforward, and I found myself going back and forth through the text. Thus, in agreement with phenomenological research, I became absorbed with the data in a detailed manner, in order to do justice, as much as possible, to the first-hand account provided by participants (Shaw, 2010).

Authors portray how themes are the product of both the participant’s experience and the analyst’s interpretation. After eliciting the themes of each interview, I started the process of finding connections between themes, and then, clustering. Each cluster was given a super-ordinate theme title. To facilitate the
process, I used tables to gather these clusters which developed into themes and sub-themes. An example of the process is included in Appendix 5.

I repeated this process for every interview, keeping the first interview analysed as a source of orientation. I sought to remain, however, open to potentially new themes. When all interviews were analysed, I used the tables to identify patterns and connections across the interviews. I drew a master table of themes, detailed with specific references both to themes shared by several participants and to those specific to particular participants. This was followed by a process of writing up in an effort to portray the participants’ experience of formation for living celibacy.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

I have been aware that my research focused on issues deemed confidential and sensitive. Thus, two primary concerns in my research were the maintainance of dignity and rights and the protection of participants from possible inner turmoil generated as a consequence of the interview.

An informed consent form (Appendix 2) was drawn up, and duly read and signed by participants. This granted them the right to withdraw from participation or from a particular question at any point in time, so as to eliminate possible feelings of coercion, and included information regarding the destruction of transcripts and recordings when the dissertation is finalised. They were also informed that conclusions from this research will be communicated to them either verbally or in writing should these be requested.
An important ethical component was the safeguarding of anonymity and confidentiality. Superiors of the participating Institutes agreed to take part in this research on condition that both the Institute and the participant remain unidentified in the presentation of findings. Bearing this mutual agreement in mind, the data was anonymised by ensuring that personal details and references to specific places which could give away the identity of participants were changed. This process was further revised during the presentation of the findings, as several other details in the interviews could have given rise to possible connections within Maltese society.

I was aware of the possibility that a participant becomes distressed when faced with particular memories and feelings during the interview. I forearmed myself to stay with the person’s pain, giving them time and space for self-recomposure. I also kept in mind the possibility of a referral to a psychotherapist or my tutor.

3.7. Reflexivity

“Qualitative research acknowledges that the researcher influences and shapes the research process, both as a person (personal reflexivity) and as a theorist/thinker (epistemological reflexivity) (Willig, 2008 p.18). Reflexivity necessitates that the researcher becomes conscious of their own involvement in the construction of meaning, and acknowledges “the impossibility to remain ‘outside of’ one’s subject matter while conducting research” (Willig, 2008, p.10). As previously mentioned, IPA works with and uses the researcher’s presuppositions and assumptions about the world instead of attempting to bracket them. Following Crotty (1998), I frequently
reflected on the assumptions I am bringing forth in the dissertation - assumptions which “shape for us the meaning of research questions, the purposiveness of research methodologies, and the interpretability of research findings” (p.17).

I used a personal journal which consistently provided me with a stimulating platform for reflecting both on my own “values, experiences, interests, beliefs” as well as to become engrossed in “questions such as: How has the research question defined and limited what can be ‘found’? How has the design of the study and the method of analysis ‘constructed’ the data and the findings?” (Willig, 2008 p.10) and others. The journal also contained notes written after meetings held with my supervisors whilst working on the proposal.

When compiling my literature review, I recorded thoughts surfacing especially when feeling confronted by doubts as to the relevance of the chosen literature for my case. I then engaged in personal reflexivity after every interview. This became my manner of venting out feelings related to the intensity or unresponsiveness of the relationship created with participants, and the different emotional states absorbed from the participants. I also became aware of my own attractions and repulsions in relation to the participants. The journal entries were also logged during the analysis, the presentation of findings and the discussion.

Apart from my dissertation supervisors, I had the possibility of sharing my thoughts and reflections with two colleague who finished their Doctorate thesis in the recent past. These colleagues were present from the inception, and walked with me through the several stages from the choice of the literature to the analysis of
interviews, drawing my attention when I was tempted to make judgements or make too much inference, instead of staying with the participants’ experience.

3.8. Credibility, Dependability, Transferability, Confirmability

I acknowledge that my results are only one version of an experience that is interpreted, rather than a unitary, quantifiable, and objective formulation of that reality (Ashworth, 2008). Even though qualitative research does not arrive at a ‘scientific’ understanding of the human world, it does ‘make a difference, that opens up new possibilities for understanding’ (McLeod, 2001, p.4). Extensive literature surrounds the development of validity criteria for qualitative research (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Yardley, 2008). Lincoln and Guba as cited in James and Mulcahy (1999), came up with four criteria for trustworthiness or rigour:

“These parallel criteria for rigour in positivist/postpositivist studies and are labelled ‘credibility’ (compared with internal validity), ‘transferability’ (compared with external validity), ‘confirmability’ (compared with objectivity) and ‘dependability’ (compared with reliability)” (Lincoln & Guba as cited in James & Mulcahy, 1999, p.2).

To ensure credibility, I went through literature on epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and method, the result of which stimulated me to take a contextual constructionist stance and settle on IPA. When decision for IPA was finalised, I further delved into literature in an attempt at deepening my knowledge of it. In an effort to acquaint myself with theory and process, my readings included

Morrow (2005) in her article about quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research, speaking specifically about interpretivist/constructivist criteria, states that “understanding participant constructions of meaning depends on a number of factors, including context, culture, and rapport.” (p.253). Following Morrow’s reflection, given my religious background, work experience with celibates and participation in formation courses for celibate living, I consider myself aptly knowledgeable as to participants’ context and culture. Whilst aware of my limitations as a novice researcher and counsellor, I exploited skills acquired in counselling training to facilitate relationship, enhance self-disclosure and thus ameliorate this research process.

Earlier on in this chapter, I included an analysis and a reflexivity section which depicts details of the process I went through. Moreover, I am including a copy of the interview guide (Appendix 1) and a sample from transcripts with its emergent themes (Appendix 5). This enhances transparency and helps reader become familiar with process I engaged in. This journey was further facilitated by discussions with supervisors and colleagues. My thinking process was invigorated by this sharing and I became open to new ideas stemming from their feedback. Their experience also guided my manner of relating to participants.

As illustrated in literature concerning qualitative research, I acknowledge that this dissertation is more of a manifestation of a phenomenon than a generalisation. As to transferability of findings, I am however positive that within the context of lay
celibates, given that readers have been provided with author’s interpretative framework and the analysis process being kept close to participants’ experience, this study can possibly help readers reflect on their own experience.

According to Madison (2005), rigour in the phenomenological interview is to a certain extent established by researcher’s disposition to remain aware of and be transparent about their preconceptions and involvement in the interview. Thus, in regard to confirmability, this study contains statements explaining how, in the making of this dissertation, I experienced ongoing phases of reflection as to my own hunches, intuitions and assumptions.

As explained by Morrow (2005), dependability is achieved by cautiously following the planned research design and by keeping an audit trail as has been demonstrated in the present chapter. This process is definitely not without limitations, mainly linked to time factors and lack of experience.

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter examined the chosen methodology together with the underlying epistemological stance and theoretical perspective. It gave details in respect of participants and the interviewing process. This was followed by a description of the analysis of the collected data. Ethical considerations were then portrayed and the trustworthiness of this study was discussed at the end of the chapter. A description of the results of this process is to be found in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4 - PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter illustrates the findings that emerged from the interviews. As delineated in the previous chapter, the interviews were first analysed individually. Themes were elicited from each interview and eventually grouped together through a process of clustering of categories. This process was not uncomplicated as I found myself going back and forth through the original interviews, notes, and themes. A table of themes (Table 1) was subsequently drawn up, showing themes and sub-themes in each category.

I will present the main themes and the sub-themes, including quotations from the transcribed interviews. Each Maltese quotation is followed by its translation in English. The pseudo name assigned to each participant, interview page number, and line numbers are included in every quotation.

4.2. Participants’ Background

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the six participants are lay celibate men and women between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-five. They come from different areas of the Maltese islands with various different educational and socio-economic backgrounds. All participants but one are involved in pastoral work. Participants are
no longer in their initial formation period and have all been assigned specific roles within their particular Institutes.

A noteworthy mention goes to a difference in the participants’ level of engagement during the interviews. One participant became deeply involved and was keen to share their experience. Although slightly less enthusiastic, three participants were also collaborative. The other two were rather brief in their answers.

4.3. The Main Themes

Five main themes, together with a number of corresponding sub-themes, were identified in the analysis of the data, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 1: The Themes and Sub-Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>SUB-THEMES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.4. Perception of the Institution as a Forming and a Sustaining Structure</td>
<td>4.4.1. Feeling sustained by a structure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4.4.2. On readiness to pronounce a definite ‘yes’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4.4.3. Facets of ongoing formation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4.4.4. Personalised formation as catalyst</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.5. The Experience of Choice, Loss and Mourning</td>
<td>4.5.1. Choice implies renunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.5.2. Experiencing loss and mourning</td>
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### 4.6. Dealing with Ongoing Challenges

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.6.1.</strong></td>
<td>Despite being celibate, you have to bear with them</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.6.2.</strong></td>
<td>Enticements not merely linked to sexual nature</td>
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### 4.7. Life as an important Instructor

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<tr>
<td><strong>4.7.1.</strong></td>
<td>Combining formation with the lived experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.7.2.</strong></td>
<td>Becoming responsible for own growth</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>4.7.3.</strong></td>
<td>Using others as models</td>
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### 4.8. Aids towards authentic celibate living

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<tr>
<td><strong>4.8.1.</strong></td>
<td>An inner conviction and a special calling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.8.2.</strong></td>
<td>Relating to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.8.3.</strong></td>
<td>Channelling of energies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4.8.4.</strong></td>
<td>Valued relationships</td>
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### 4.4. Perception of Institution as a Forming and a Sustaining Structure

The sources of formation received within an Institution are experienced by participants as having the aim of forming and granting a sustaining structure of support necessary for living celibacy.
4.4.1. *Feeling sustained by a structure*

Jane stresses the need for a supporting structure:

“Otherwise you lose heart and surely go with the flow.” (Jane)

“*Għax kieku taqta’ qalbek u tinġarr mal-kurrent żgur.*” (Jane: 7,10)

George shares on how structured formation creates a reservoir of knowledge and experiences to resort back to. Mark feels the need to regularly consult a sustaining resource - spiritual direction.

“You notice this person is there to help you. Even the non-verbals, transmit the message of ‘Let’s calm down a bit and look at things through God’s perspective’.”

(Mark)

“*Dil-persuna taraha li qieģhda hemm għalik. Anke in-non-verbals, ikun qed jittrażmetti il-messaġġ ta’ ‘Ejjew nikkalmaw daqsxejn u naraw l-affarijiet mid-dawl ta’ Alla’.*” (Mark: 12,12-14)

George insists on the significance of remaining connected to this structure to ensure continued growth. In fact, Anna attributes adherence to her chosen state of life to the support and formation received.

“Without formation, I don’t think you would be able to make it.” “I stayed ... because I found a lot of support from my group.” (Anna)

“*Mingħajr formazzjoni ma nahsibx li ṭa tkun kapaċi tasal*. “*U bqajt... ghax sibt ħafna sapport minn shabi.*” (Anna: 8,21-22;1,19)
Jane and Carmen mention how they are flooded with messages coming in through their profession and the social media. They argue that celibacy lived in a world becoming ever more challenging requires a structure sustaining the person.

4.4.2. On readiness to pronounce a definitive ‘yes’

Participants ponder on the importance of being informed and formed before taking celibate commitment. Anna asserts that formation is important for an informed choice,

“And the choice must be yours, and not others’…” (Anna)

“u l-qażla trid tkun tieqhek u mhux ta’ haddieħor…” (Anna: 5, 22)

This serves to offset enthusiasm generally accompanying the candidate for celibacy.

“When you start, at the beginning, all seems appealing, I think, all easy…”
(Carmen)

“Meta tidhol, għall-bidu, naħseb tara kollox sabiħ, kollox ħafif…” (Carmen: 16,21)

Anna, John and Mark value the guidance and understanding received during this initial stage, when candidates go through busy study periods. Jane, Anna and Carmen maintain that the early stages of vocation require an adherence to a well-prepared formation programme with a group of same-aged peers - a factor Jane is nostalgic about, since she happened to be the only candidate during her initial formation. Sharing of life experiences seems to be of crucial importance to these participants.
During the course of the interview, John remembers how initial formation facilitated insight in relation to experiences of loss:

“I remember calling him crying because I realised that I could never become a father, or rather, not that I could not, but that I would never become a father. ... While aware of this choice, I suddenly realised what this choice meant for me.” (John)

“niftakarni ċempiltlu nolfoq u nibki għaliex indunajt li jien ma nistax insir missier, jew mhux ma nistax, m’iniex se nkun missier... waqt li naf bl-għażla, jiġifieri f’daqqa wahda irrealizzajt xi tfisser din l-għażla”. (John: 5,10-13)

Mark and Jane are fairly critical about their own experience of initial formation. They doubt whether a definitive ‘yes’ is pronounced in full awareness of consequences, and would prefer a longer period of structured formation to acquire more life experience.

“I don’t think that in the beginning you understand what you are leaving behind ... You understand what you are doing, it is not that you don’t understand... but rather you don’t grasp the full consequence of your choice.” (Jane)

“Ma nahsibx li tifhem ghall-ewwel x’se thalli ...Tkun tifhem x’se taghmel, mhux ma tifhimx, ta... Imma lanqs tifhem kollox x’se jgħaddi minn għalik”.

(Jane: 2,18-20;2,1)

Mark comments on the difficulty of internalising initial formation values. His reflection portrays how personal struggles overshadow initial formation, indicating that method of formation might not have taken into consideration the person’s stage of life. Sensing deficiency in the human formation provided, George and Jane
accentuate a desire to find a suitable balance between spiritual and human formation.

**4.4.3. Facets of ongoing formation**

Considering the large number of facets generated throughout the interviews, I choose to portray the most significant.

Participants recommend that a healthy formation experience requires a balance between a theoretical component, the practical experience and spiritual direction. Carmen and Mark affirm that there exists no perfect recipe for formation content suiting every person’s particular needs and foreseeing all the unexpected occurrences. Mark iterates that formation, like any other undertaking, is a subjective experience depending on the willingness of one’s self.

“But not unless I have made an effort. The effort is an integral part of the package.” (Mark)

“Imma mhux wara li nkun ghamilt l-isforz tieghi. L-isforz huwa parti integrali mill-pakkett”. (Mark: 13,17-18)

Mark’s culmination of his formation experience takes place during a process of discernment with his Spiritual Director. The result of this practice, preceded by years of other instances of formation, is a profound meeting with Christ.

“I believe that formation… I received the most important formation when I realised that Jesus had called me.” (Mark)
“Naħseb jien, il-formazzjoni, l-ikbar formazzjoni, rċevejtha meta rrealizzajt ġi bil-Gesù sejjahli.” (Mark: 7,11-12)

Similarly, reflecting on her understanding of formation, Jane concludes that formation is a configuration to Christ.

Mark reflects on how his personality went through a process of transformation mainly due to formation opportunities.

“That is, I put my fears aside, and my false self-perceptions, and I overcome my low self-esteem.” (Mark)

“Jiġifieri neħħejt il-biżgħat fil-ġenb, warrabb il-perċezzjonjiet foloz kif ġiħares lejja nnifsi, u negħleb is-self-esteem dgħajjef”. (Mark: 11,5-6)

Anna explains how life experiences as well as formation have brought about a significant change in her personality - from a timid girl towards becoming capable of expressing emotions. John, George and Jane attribute to formation a sense of improved relationships.

John elaborates on how formation challenges truthfulness and authenticity. Having been in a role carrying responsibility, he recounts how candidates who are possibly unfaithful to their vocation choose to leave their vocation as a result of the quality of the formation received.

“Because the formation we are receiving enables you to be honest, and even with yourself. I thus cannot be insincere.” (John)

“Għax it-tip ta’ formazzjoni li qed nirċievu twasslek biex tkun onest, u anke miegħek innifsek. Mela jiena ma nistax inkun faċċjol.” (John: 14,21-22)
Anna mentions the possibility of receiving formation with lay celibate men. This could reduce the fear and insecurities experienced in relationships with the opposite sex. Jane and Anna long for more formal and informal meetings with same-aged female peers. Creating a space wherein to share personal experiences in an informal manner strengthens vocation.

4.4.4. Personalised formation as a catalyst

Though not necessarily institutionalised, personalised formation features prominently in the life of the celibate. A need transpiring on numerous instances is that of having a personal guiding companion. Being accompanied by a Spiritual Director in discernment is described by Mark as catalyst in formation.

“It has helped me a lot and sometimes I felt that it would be my last session, since I was about to stop in the face of current challenges, but then after Direction, I would feel changed, consoled that things were much better.”

(Mark)

“Għenni ħafna u ġieli ħassejnir se mmur għall-aħħar sessjoni ġhax kont se nieqaf minħabba l-isfidi li kont qed ingarrab, u noħroġ mid-Direzzjoni mibdul, ikkunslat ħafna li l-affarijjet ikunu qagħdu ħafna”. (Mark: 12,9-12)

John, Mark, George and Carmen state that their experiences with a spiritual director require openness, authenticity, sincerity and trust. For Anna, this practice is not without effort. She iterates that both pride and personality characteristics have a bearing on this relationship and thus finds this endeavour demanding.
Participants generally resort to personalised support when feelings of hopelessness in regard of fruitfulness of mission, and helplessness as to the purpose of living celibacy pervade. Sexual feelings and issues are typically shared as well. Carmen is reassured that such feelings are normal.

“but with the help of the person guiding you, they sort of put your mind at rest that it’s normal. We are human. It’s a part of our life, eh. It is nothing that should frighten or worry you.” (Carmen)

“imma bil-ghajnuna ta’ min imexxik u hekk, speċi jserrħulek rasek li, isma’, it’s normal hux. We are human. It’s part of our life, hu. Mhux xi ħaġa li għandha tbeżżghek jew tinkwetak”. (Carmen: 6,2-3)

Pondering on spiritual direction, Anna underlines the importance of reaching a balance between dependency and autonomy when faced with decisions.

Participants consider counselling an added help to personalised formation. Jane is convinced that modern life exigencies call for specialised psychological services. Mark recounts how the help of a counselling psychologist helped him discover his real self:

“It brought to light several issues. ... At first, I was very sceptical... Later, after going through it and discovering in depth who I truly am... I received help to be able to address issues which I was previously unaware of ... And I feel that this really helped me address my human weaknesses.” (Mark)

“dak tella’ ħafna affarijiet fil-wiċċ... Ghall-bidu kont xettiku ħafna...Wara li għamiltu u skoprejt fil-profond min jien... irċevejt ghajnuna sabiex nindirizza
Anna describes a period of work-related stress and reflects on how availing herself of counselling could have been healing, instead of resorting to medicine. Coming from a family sceptical of psychological services, John describes how counselling helped him get in touch with his real self. George, Mark and Jane state how a referral system operates within their respective Institutes. After a one-to-one consultation, members in need of specialised treatment are referred to psychological services.

4.5. The Experience of Choice, Loss and Mourning

For participants, choosing becomes a daily endeavour and the experience of renunciation is many-a-time intense since living celibacy implies a high sense of duty.

4.5.1. Choice implies renunciation

George speaks of an early encounter with his Spiritual Director during which he considered marriage.

“I imagined having a family of my own, children with that person, then ... you talk over certain things, why not... they are important in my opinion...It is important to think of them, because otherwise... you... would be choosing one thing without having an option...” (George)
“immaġinajt li jkolli nibni familja, tfal ma’ dik il-persuna, imbagħad...
titkellimhom ċerti affarijiet, ġialiex le... huma fl-opinjoni tiegħi importanti...
Allaħares ma jiġux, ġhax inkella inti tkun... ġhażilt xi ħaġa waħda... minn waħda...” (George: 9,10-13)

Although several participants argue that they were not prepared enough when uttering their first ‘yes’, they explain how they chose their vocation out of their own free will. John was previously in a relationship and Mark and George had romantic proposals when already in vocation.

“there were times when a woman at University talked to me in a certain way... wanting to start a relationship... I realised... but I was always of a particular personality, of course, we can definitely be friends, but only a friendship, that’s all.” (George)

“kien hemm mumenti meta tfajla l-Università tkellmek u tkellmek f’ċertu livell ta’... li tixtieq tibda’ relazzjoni... tinduna hux... imma dejjem kont ta’ ċerta personalità, mela le, ġbiberija bil-qalb kollha, imma s’hemm naslu.”

(George: 9,3-6)

“There were several instances, and with great intensity, and I don’t know how I managed to keep going till now as part of this Institute. There were some intense moments when I felt that I was missing out on too much...” (Mark)

“Kien hemm ħafna drabi u b’mod qawwi ħafna, u ma nafx kif irnexxieli nkompili s’issa li nghix f’dan l-Istitut. Kien hemm mumenti qawwija ħafna fejn ħasnejtni qed nitlef ħafna...” (Mark: 5,4-6)
Jane, John, Carmen and Anna testify that awareness of renunciation is a gradual process shaped by formation.

“As you grow older, I think that you realise even more what you left behind. But I think that this is... part of formation and even some meetings that we have, help us to... cope better, so as to say...” (Carmen)

“inti u tikber naħseb tibda tirrealizza aktar x’ħallejt warajk. Imma naħseb illi dan... parti mill-formazzjoni u anke ċerti laqghat li jkollna jghinuk biex... tikkopja, ha nghid hekk ...” (Carmen: 6,13-15)

Formation is experienced as having an impact on the ability of gaining self-control. This needs to be coupled with the person’s will:

“and I think that you have to exert self control, because desires are normally felt... and the formation that you received helps you too.” (Anna)

“u naħseb trid tkun minnek inti li tikkontrolla wkoll, għax jiġuk xewqat, normali... U anke l-formazzjoni li tkun ħadt ħa tgħinek ukoll”. (Anna: 2,12-13)

Mark mentions how formation helps him achieve control over the misuse of internet.

“In the evening I said “I’m going to err.” So I just switched off.” (Mark)

“Filgħaxija stess għidt, “Ħa niżbalja, hu”. Allura tfejt, ħriġt minn kollox”.

(Mark: 15,14-15)

4.5.2. Experiencing loss and mourning

Notwithstanding the fact that all participants choose celibacy out of own free will, this is not without alternating periods of suffering. Some participants mention
occasional desires for a loving, caring and supportive partner. The experience of siblings, work colleagues and friends going through loving relationships makes the celibate commitment taxing for Anna.

“for example, at the moment, at work there is a widow who is in a relationship with someone, and you see that the relationship is good, they care for each other, ... and you feel these things...” (Anna)

“fuq ix-xogħol, per eżempju, bħalissa hemm xi ħadd li hija armla, imma qiegħda in a relationship ma’ xi ħadd, u inti li r-relazzjoni hija tajba, caring, u tħosshom dawn l-affarijiet...” (Anna: 11,7-9)

For Carmen, the experience of loneliness brought about by not having a partner, accompanied by feelings of not being understood, alters the initial meanings associated with celibacy and urges her to consider other paths. Resorting to prayer and personalised help brings the experience to a resolution. Participants, in fact, stress that a close relationship with Jesus gives meaning to celibacy. Meaningful relationships with celibate brothers and sisters, formation personnel and friends, sustain their vocation.

Mark discloses that mourning is a personal process initiated after acceptance of loss.

“Maybe I was not able to take a personal stand and say ‘This is the price I have to pay.” I found it very difficult. Maybe unconsciously I didn’t want to do it, to admit that, ‘Look, having a girlfriend is not my calling, but I am called for celibacy.” (Mark)
The mourning process is not without regressions. Being in constant contact with youth, idealisation of romantic relationships amplifies feelings of loss for Mark. John describes his feelings of grief upon realisation of renunciation:

“...my manner of grieving, how I realised that ‘John, you have had it!’ But no... it was my own free choice.” (John)

“...mod grieving tiegħi ta’ kif irrealizzajt li, ‘John, you have had it!’ Imma le... Ghax l-għażla kienet free” (John: 5,22-23)

Another loss to live through is that of not generating physically - the grief of some being borne with greater emotion. John’s reaction, described in the previous theme, is distressing. Carmen recounts her experience of having to let go of things which normally attract the general population - being loved by a particular person and motherhood - the latter increasing in intensity during mid-life.

“I think that every woman feels proud to have children of her own, I imagine. And maybe as you grow older, you realise that as time passes by, the lesser the probability...” (Carmen)

“Naħseb kull mara tkun proud li jkollha it-tfal tagħha, hu, nimmaġina. U forsi inti u tikber tibda tirrealizza li aktar ma jghaddi ż-żmien aktar ma hemmx iċ-ċans li inti...” (Carmen: 18,11-13)
Helplessness and hopelessness surfacing when vocation numbers dwindle and mentality changes due to generational differences is another loss to be dealt with. This often compels Mark to deeply search his current motivating factors.

“What do I keep on going through this great stress? Every day, invariably. These thoughts, I remember well, were worrying me a lot and breaking me…” (Mark)


Mark and Anna make meaning of their loss experience by being creative in their manner of relating to Christ. Their interview, falling on February 14th, revives memories of their dealing with ‘lover’s day’:

“...the 14th of February, I always considered it a special day for my relationship with the Lord. Today, many people look at it as the special day for couples... today it is my special day with the Lord.” (Mark)

“... l-14 ta’ Frar, dejjem ħarist lejha bħala l-ġurnata specjali tieghi fir-relazzjoni tieghi mal-Mulej. Illum, jekk ħafna jħarsu lejha bħala l-ġurnata tal-mahbubin... illum hija l-ġurnata tieghi mal-Mulej.” (Mark: 2,7-10)

“it was Valentine’s Day. Some were with their partner, their husband, and I spent more time in the Chapel, or in front of the Blessed Sacrament, because I have given myself to Him...” (Anna)

“Issa kien il-Valentine’s Day. Min kien qieghed mal-kumpann tiegħu, mar-raǵel, u jiena mort u għaddejt aktar ħin f’kappella, jew quddiem is-Sagrament, għax jiena lilu tajt lili nnifsi...” (Anna: 11,14-16)
4.6. **Dealing with Ongoing Challenges**

Participants elaborate on how celibate living implies going through human and worldly challenges.

4.6.1. **Despite being celibate, you have to bear with them**

Jane is incisive in her statement in regard of sexuality. She says,

“Our inner instincts... whether you are lay or a consecrated person, you are always going to get these feelings. (Jane)

“L-istinti li għandha ġewwa fina... kemm ‘k ‘inti lajk, kemm jekk int religjuż...
xorta se thosshom dawn l-affarijiet...” (Jane: 2,5-6)

Participants own an awareness that, notwithstanding the profession of celibacy, they are sexual beings. Although openness in regard of sexual issues varies, all own a concern and a desire for keeping in touch with their sexual selves, accepting needs and feelings, and channelling qualities in areas appropriate for celibate living.

When asked about difficulties in living celibacy, Carmen talks about how during her menstruation she becomes more sensitive and craving for care. Formation has taught her how to cope with such feelings. Though strongly acknowledging the importance of healthy relationships with the opposite sex, Carmen and Anna argue that crossing of certain boundaries with men could well portray a risk, especially when feeling vulnerable.
Mark alludes to the difficulties encountered when surrounded by young, beautiful ladies at his workplace. He also mentions the temptation to satisfy his sexual urges through certain web content. John feels particularly prone to be unfaithful to his vow of chastity when life problems such as health issues and abrupt changes in plans compromise his wellbeing. As a consequence, he feels depressed and reduces his time of prayer.

“When you weaken this relationship, you are more prone to give in.” (John)

“La darba tnaqqas din ir-relazzjoni, inti suxxettibli biex taqa’”. (John 16,1-2)

Mark confesses that in spite of adequate formation, existential questions pursue endlessly, weaknesses live on and temptation to regress is present. He fluctuates from phases of contentment to periods of restlessness.

“Sometimes, there are phases when I feel very much in place, happy and content, fulfilled with living celibately. During other phases of life, which are sometimes prolonged, I feel as if I’m wasting my life. I keep questioning again the issues which I thought I had previously settled and put in place…” (Mark)

“U rrid ngħid illi jiġu perjodi fejn narani vera f’posti, u vera kuntent u ma jonqosni xejn li nghix iċ-ċelibat. U jiġu perjodi, kultant twal ikunu, fejn jiena qed narani nahli ħajti. Il-mistoqsijiet il-kbar jerġghu jqumu u dak li qabel ħsibt illi kien issetiljat u f’postu…” (Mark: 20,7-10)
4.6.2. Enticements not merely linked to a sexual nature

An emergent challenge felt by Mark is that of choosing to live a comfortable life and:

“instead of being celibate, you end up being single - a bachelor who lives life in a comfortable manner.” (Mark)

“minflok ċelibi tispiċċa għażeb - ġuvni li t/stretch il-ħajja b’mod komdu għalik.” (Mark: 3,13-14)

He explains how not having a partner and offspring could be translated into trouble-free and self-centred living.

“Because you have no ties and you have no debt problems and headaches because children do not want to sleep, or do not want to study, or your wife who may be deceiving you.” (Mark)

“Għax int m’għandekx rabtiet u m’għandekx problemi ta’ djun u wġieġħ ta’ ras għax it-tfal ma jridux jorqdu, u ma jridux jistudjaw, jew il-mara qed tittradik”. (Mark: 3,9-10)

Mark’s observation links to Carmen’s frustration when witnessing the lack of enthusiasm of younger celibates. She fears commitment is at risk and believes phenomenon to be culturally related. Carmen is apprehensive at how younger celibates could be lured to follow the ‘comfortable’ path. This challenge is tackled by an increase in length of the initial formation period before their definite ‘yes’ is pronounced, as mentioned in Theme 1.
Some participants state that leading a stressful life due to multiple responsibilities at home, work, and apostolate, is no mean feat. Carmen becomes emotional when I mention that she looks worn-out, but doesn’t share her feelings verbally. Her answer to my observation discloses that fatigue is further aggravated owing to a decrease in vocations. As vocation numbers shrink, commitments multiply and energy levels decline.

Most participants describe how adhering to God’s calling goes against the current. Moreover, choosing celibacy whilst remaining in the world is especially challenging. However, Anna affirms:

“inspite of the difficulties encountered in the world, you have to remain in the world but not be of the world. I think this is the best description.” (Anna)

“Minkejja id-diffikultajiet li ssib fid-dinja, trid tkun fid-dinja naħseb imma mhux tad-dinja…. Naħseb dik hi l-iktar sentenza li toqghod”. (Anna: 2,7-8)

John and Jane explicate how they are exposed to vulgar language and mild exhibitionism at their workplaces. Both use their moral values to enhance ambience, whilst respecting their colleagues. However, John, aware of human weaknesses, argues that he could easily be carried away. Prayer and sacrifice guard and help John.

“if I do not deepen my relationship with God, or else try to find a way...” (John)

“jekk ma nkabbarx iktar ir-relazzjoni m’Alla, jew inkella nipprova nara x’se naghmel...” (John: 16,12-13)
4.7. Life as an Important Instructor

Throughout the progression of interviews, participants become more conscious of the impact daily experiences bear on celibate living.

4.7.1. Combining formation with the lived experience

Asked to reflect on his understanding of celibacy, Mark fervently proclaims that his answer reveals his,

“profound experience, what I understand. The emphasis is on the experience, rather than on my knowledge.” (Mark)

“esperjenza profonda, x’nimhem jien. L-aċċenn huwa fuq l-esperjenza iktar milli n-knowledge tieghi.” (Mark: 1,21-22)

He recounts on how he is frequently coerced to take rapid decisions in the face of demanding situations. These experiences bring forth important life lessons. Carmen claims that intellectual awareness of renunciation becomes real through practical life experiences. She argues that although formation does help celibate living, personality structure and the lived experience make their mark. George attributes his inner growth process mostly to experience:

“But then when you acquire that experience you start remembering, the issues covered in theory resurface, so you start making links.” (George)
Jane, ruminating on her early understandings of celibacy, speaks on how this evolved and has been reviewed. Whilst having had a lack of exposure to sexual education, Jane claims that new work experiences and the effects of the social media grant her a more comprehensive image of celibacy, bringing forth new challenges.

George states how some practical aspects of celibacy, for example, how to cope with living on one’s own, were not tackled in formation. He thus experienced difficulty in combining formation with the lived experience and calls for more specific formation on celibacy. George resorts to Spiritual Direction to fill in the gaps of Institutional formation. He believes that maturity acquired through life experience allows for a positive shift in one’s view of celibacy - from a blurred understanding with some negative connotations to a personally-owned choice.

Mark contends how being personally followed by a formator, coupled with personal effort and full immersion in daily experiences, transformed him from being hesitant and soft towards becoming assertive and challenging.

“That is the way I see Descartes today, the way he developed his philosophy, he ignored all the classics and said ‘I want the book of life to enlighten me.’”
(Mark)

“Dak kif illum inħares lejn Descartes, il-mod kif żviluppa l-fiilosofija tiegħu, warrab il-klassiċi kollha u qal “jien il-ktieb tal-ħajja nixtieq illi jgħallimni”.
(Mark: 10,11-12)
4.7.2. Becoming responsible for own growth

“Who am I to receive this gift? And what great responsibility I bear to be faithful and loyal!” (Mark)

“Min jien jien biex nirċievi dan id-don? U x’reponsabbiltà fuqi kbira biex inkun fidil u lejali!” (Mark: 21,10-11)

Mark’s statement is echoed in all interviews. Participants believe in the need and significance of becoming personally responsible for own formation. John stresses that formation is not only associated with a formal structure. As celibates mature and become capable of assessing own needs, they can avail themselves of numerous possibilities offered by the Church and society. Carmen argues how this becomes a deeply felt need and desire – both to be better equipped personally and to be able to pass on formation to others.

Anna, whilst asserting that the main responsibility for formation lies with the person, trusts that this depends on the will of the person to seek further help.

“This is a weakness of mine, I tend to remain passive for some time, then when I feel that the crisis is a bit heavy, I then seek help...” (Anna)

“Hija xi ṣaġa jiena nhoss naqra difett fija, noqghod lura, qisu x’hin inħossni li l-kriżi tkun kibret naqra sew imbagħad qisni nfittex l- גביjuna...” (Anna: 12,3-4)

She further stresses that relying on self-help is not advocated when living celibacy.

For Anna, structured formation hopefully becomes a training ground encouraging the
person to ask for help when in need. Discussing annual retreats offered by her Institute on a voluntary basis, Anna says:

“These are opportunities that you have to seek, they are there but you have to avail yourself of them, no one is going to tell you what to do.” (Anna)

“Dawn huma li trid tfittixhom inti, qed tifhem, qegehdm hemm imma inti trid tfittixhom, hadd mhu se jiği jghidlek, ‘isma’, mur aqhmel hekk’…” (Anna: 9,6-7)

Mark satisfies a yearning to further improve his human formation by attending courses organised by Church organisations:

“I received a lot of help from the various courses I participated in - sensitivity training, the help of a counsellor... seminars about human relationships, about assertive feedback.” (Mark)

“ghanuni ħafna d-diversi korsijiet li ħadt - sensitivity training, ghajnuna ta’ counsellour... seminars fuq relazzjonijiet umani, fuq feedback assertiv”. (Mark: 9,9-13)

Mark also dedicates substantial time in reading literature related to consecrated celibacy.

4.7.3. Using others as models

Most participants relate experiences of gaining strength when looking up to older and wiser celibate persons. Anna explains how having role-models to look up to is decisive during the initial stages of vocation.
“you keep on coming, but you are not sure why. You feel an attraction... or a person makes an impact on you.” (Anna)

“tibqa’ tiği u ma tafx għal xiex. Imma thoss dik ix-xi ħaġa tiġbdek... jew tkun laqtitek dik il-persuna...” (Anna: 6,18-19)

She maintains that elder sisters represent wisdom and maintain a link with tradition. Whilst aware that difficult relationships exist as within a family, she is open to receive good examples from every member. When asked to reflect on how his relationships with formators helped him live celibacy, George recounts how

“I look at all my fellow brethren who helped me through example and I say:

‘Yes, I would like to be like that.’”

“il-membri kollha shabi li ghenuni nhares lejn il-ħajja tağhom u nghid, ‘Iva, nixtieq inkun hekk, jiena’. ” (George: 11,5-6)

Carmen reflects on how much she learns from and connects to experiences of Saints going through dark moments. She mentions being awestricken when reading Mother Theresa of Calcutta’s life story.

“I never dreamt that Mother Theresa goes through such experiences. These experiences are helpful. If I were to go through similar situations, I know that it is normal, to live through loneliness.” (Carmen)

“lanqas kont noħlomha li Mother Theresa għaddiet minn x’hiex għaddiet. Allura dawn l-esperjenzi jgħinuk. Jekk jien se nghaddi minnhom, tghid hija ħaġa normali hu, to live through loneliness”. (Carmen: 15,15-17)

Another source of support for celibate living are authors with whom Mark identifies and feels deeply understood.
“According to Nouwen, the common factor that unites us is human frailty. This helps us to understand each other. Our fragility is not our destruction but it is the characteristic that makes us more human.” (Mark)

“Qisu għal Nouwen, il-fattur komuni li jgħaqqadna hija l-fraġilità umana. Li dik tgħinna nifhmu hafna l-persuni. U mhix il-qerda tagħna l-fraġilità tagħna, imma hija l-punt li lilna jagħmilna aktar bnedmin”. (Mark: 16,22-24)

4.8. Aids towards Authentic Celibate Living

This concluding theme draws on aspects related to motivation and perseverance captured through formation. A shared belief for living celibacy is the grace of God bestowed on the person, incorporating an element of mystery and leaving for the unexplainable.

4.8.1. An inner conviction and a special calling

Following extensive periods of discernment, Mark’s inner conviction prevails albeit difficulties in living celibacy. His serenity arises through the discovery and reassurance of being called by Jesus.

“There is the fact that I know Jesus called me. The fact that I know for sure that Mark is Mark, and the true Mark is there and my true freedom is there and I feel it, when I think and realise that I was called by Jesus for this style of life.” (Mark)
Carmen iterates how loyalty and inner conviction are sustained when becoming daily conscious of living celibacy. Anna believes that remaining attracted to the charism sustains inner conviction. She captures the intensity of her inner flame when missing out on meetings due to illness.

Interviewees gain strength from experiencing celibacy as a special calling. According to John, celibacy is lived by the few receiving a special calling by the Lord.

“Not everyone is called for celibacy. I think that those who are called, are given a special help that enables them to truly live it.” (John)

“Mhux kulħadd imsejjah biex ikun ċelebi. U naħseb dawk li huma msejjin ghandhom ghajnuna speċjali biex ikunu jistgħu jghixuh”. (John: 3,5-6)

Getting to know personally the few others striving to live celibacy becomes a source of strength for John. Carmen’s experience of a special calling comes through the awareness and fulfilment received when being regarded as a role-model. Being influenced by several Christian martyrs, Mark treasures a distinctive meaning in living celibacy when comparing it to an act of martyrdom.

“I think that during moments when I felt it impossible to live celibacy, I used to say: ‘This is my martyrdom’. I think that gave me the necessary strength.”

(Mark)
4.8.2. Relating to God

Mark explains that living celibacy without prioritising on a personal relationship with God is similar to confining oneself to a downfall. He argues that this relationship is not limited to memorised prayers but based on a heartfelt dialogue with the Lord, leading to a realisation of being personally loved by Jesus. For John living celibacy in a responsible manner implies a steady relationship with God.

“the relationship is there, you take care of it, you watch it, you nourish it, you tend to it, you talk to someone, see to your needs.” (John)

“ir-relazzjoni se tkun hemm, tieħu ħsiebha, tindukraha, issaqqiha, tiżborha, titkellem ma’ xi ħadd, tara l-bżonnijiet”. (John: 13,1-2)

All participants go through difficult periods in their vocation. Together with the help of a spiritual director or formator, they mention invoking God’s help in prayer for the gift of perseverance. Carmen went through a very difficult period when faced with the death of a relative. She recounts how she managed to deal with such experience:

“I think that with the help I found, and even the fact that whilst I am angry at God, but at the same time I felt the need to pray and keep close to Him.”

(Carmen)
Carmen’s experience reflects an animate relationship with God. Similarly, Anna states that it is a personal relationship with the Lord which gives meaning to losses.

4.8.3. Channelling of energies

For participants, living celibately calls for redirecting sexual and affective energies towards acceptable channels. John finds ways for channeling his love in a creative manner. He mentions his relationship with several children he taught over the years and how he remains a point of reference for them as they grow up.

“I cannot say that I am not able to give what I was afraid of not being able to give, that is, love.” (John)

“ma nistax nghid li m’iniex qed naghti dak li kont nibża’ li m’iniex se naghti, jiġifieri, l-imħabba”. (John: 6,11-12)

Mark mentions a gradual maturity process when dealing with students, and how:

“this helped a lot with how I used my paternal instinct when tending to the children in my care. This worked in all aspects of my sexuality.” (Mark)

“dik ghenet hafna ma’ kif jien nisfrutta l-istint patern tiegħi fil-kura tat-tfal li ġew afdati f’idejja. Dik hadmet imbagħad fl-isfera shiha tas-sesswalità tiegħi”. (Mark: 5,1-3)
Carmen speaks of her need to exploit her female characteristics both with the young as well as with her sisters in the Institute.

“certain emotions, the caring, you use them as a celibate with the people you encounter, with children, with young people, with your colleagues…” (Carmen)

“ċerti emozzjonijiet, il-caring, tużahom fiċ-ċelibat tieghek ma’ persuni li tilaqa’ magħhom, mat-tfal jew maż-żghażagh, ma’ shabek…” (Carmen: 5,5-6)

She observes how, as she grows in years, she becomes a reference point for several who are seeking to live celibacy, especially young males. This grants her contentment and enhances her sense of womanhood.

4.8.4. Valued relationships

Whilst stressing that living celibacy is not easy, Jane says that, together with formation contributions, hopelessness is overcome by the sustenance received from like-minded persons. She feels the need to share her innermost and troubling experiences with trusted persons. Anna iterates that good feelings related to sexuality are experienced when healthy relationships prevail.

“you feel that you are being cared for, it is not as if you attended the meeting and no one cares... even the fact that we find time to talk together...you care for your brethren...” (Anna)

“illi tħoss li qed jagħtu kasek, li mhux ġejt dhalt il-laqgħa qisu ma dahal ħadd... anke dik li nsibu naqra ħin li nitkellmu, qed tifhem, li jimpurtak minn shabek...” (Anna: 2,23-25)
John describes the endless support he receives from numerous male and female friendships, celibate and not. His wide-ranging friendships include several married couples who support his celibate commitment.

Carmen appreciates male-female cooperation in apostolate initiatives, giving her an opportunity to work and build relationships with celibate males. She underlines how she values the support and care received by male celibates and how such relationships do not daunt celibacy.

“even in difficult moments, we support each other. Why not! But then you have to be mature enough not to cross boundaries. But I see nothing wrong in having certain friendships, I think it is healthy…” (Carmen)

“anke f’mumenti iebsin, li nissapportjaw lil xulxin. Why not! Imma mbaghad trid tuża l-maturità tiegħek u toqgħod attenta ma jkunx hemm kunfidenzi żejda, u hekk. Imma ma nara xejn ħażin li inti jkollok ċerti ħbiberiji… naraha healthy jiena…” (Carmen: 14,11-14)

4.9.  **Conclusion**

The objective of this chapter was that of elucidating participants’ experiences as co-constructed together with the researcher. In the next chapter, I will reflect on the emergent themes, linking them to the existing literature.
CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the most important findings that have emerged from participants’ interviews, and reflect on them in light of literature. This process also represents my own manner of integrating the two together to generate new understandings. I acknowledge that such reflections are tentative, given the idiographic nature of the study.

For the purpose of further clarity, in this chapter I am including some references to participants’ quotes. The quotes are included in Appendix 6.

5.2. Perception of Institution as a Forming and Sustaining Structure

An early emerging theme was that living celibacy for the Kingdom requires a stable and sustaining structure. My attention to this notion might have been drawn to the fact that albeit not living within a community, participants generally seem to perceive and experience formation as a solid experience. This sustains the teachings of the Church on lay secular institutes, in that, a strong spirit of communion between members (PME, 1947) grants a secure point of reference (Rocchetta, 1994). Whilst a great deal of studies have been carried out in regard to formation within seminaries and religious institutions, the experience and perception of formation amongst lay consecrated persons is markedly less evident in literature. Data from interviews
portrays similarities with the priesthood and religious life in the manner lay consecrated persons experience formation.

The study reiterates the impact formators have on formees (Nugent, 2000). A stable formator - formee relationship lies at the basis of a suitable formation program (Rulla, 1985; De Souza, 2007; VC, 1996; PI, 1990). Participants depend on their guiding and understanding. Mark and Carmen explain how, during individual sessions, the formator is trusted with the most intimate and disturbing life experiences both on a human and a spiritual level (Mark: 12,9-12) (Cencini, 1994). Recalling several experiences with formators, their elaborations seem to reveal an ability to identify essential characteristics in formators' behaviour, distinguishing between mature and less mature, and remarking on how their availability and living witness speak more than words. This further seems to reflect literature which reiterates that, the dynamics created between formator and formee (De Souza, 2007), taking into account conscious and unconscious elements (Cencini, 1994a), call for specialised training for formators (Rulla, 1985; Cencini, 1994a; Manenti, 1988; Kuttianimattathil et al., 2012; Nugent, 2000). Participants portray their relationship to the Spiritual Director as having attributes similar to the formator (Nugent, 2000). Indications given in Ratios highlighting the usefulness of both group and individual formation meetings is also to be evidenced in data.

Participants expounded on their willingness or hesitancy to be open to and available for this journey of personal growth, a fundamental attitude in formation referred to as ‘docibilitas’ (docility) (Cencini, 2002). Whilst Ratios explicate that such relationship is compulsory for all members, the capacity of the person for this
encounter seems to vary, depending on past experiences. As elaborated in Sipe (2003), early childhood patterns of attachment and separation to and from the mother become the basis for the security needed for relationships. The trained formator should be competent enough to identify conscious and unconscious patterns (Cencini, 1994a), help formees improve their ability of self-disclosure (John & Varkay, 2012), whilst granting a secure enough relationship which facilitates further growth (Sipe, 2003). Anna described a fear of becoming dependent on this relationship. Whilst this fear could result from a fear of intimacy, over-dependencies signify a weakness in personal identity (John & Varkay, 2012; McClone, 2009). As a matter of fact, formators are called to help formees assume a different attitude and become less dependent (Cencini, 1994a).

Literature suggests that commitment to celibacy is a process of becoming and is still unclear during the early years of formation (Balducelli, 1975; Sipe, 2003; Mannath, 2012). This seems to be the case with Mark’s and Jane’s concern as to their readiness to pronounce their first ‘yes’ (Jane: 2,18-20;2,1). They acknowledge that, in spite of formation efforts, the consequences of celibacy are not well-understood at that time. Notable changes have in the past decade been registered as to the length of time required within formation before first vows are professed (Code of Canon Law, p.723). This trend goes along with Rulla’s (1985) studies maintaining that the recipient of God’s calling is driven by both conscious and unconscious motivations which need to be worked through during qualified formation encounters for a more informed choice (Cencini, 1994a; Manenti, 2007). Data shows how formation does not consequentially lead to maturity in all areas of one’s being (Cencini, 1994a; 1994b;
2005) but involves a process of moving forward and sometimes, regressing (Mannath, 2012). Furthermore, the internalisation of vocational values (Rulla, 1985) is preceded by other possible motivations - compliance and identification (Kelman as cited in Cencini & Manenti, 2000) - which are typical during the early stages of formation. Internalisation finally “occurs when an individual accepts a belief because it is congruent with his basic value system” (Rulla, 2003 p.150). This on-going process possibly paves the way for an authentic meeting with Christ (De Souza, 2007 p.93).

Despite considerable literature portraying the usefulness of human formation within *Ratios*, application of this process seems arduous. From their experience, George and Jane are aware that the balance between spiritual and human formation proposed by Church documents (VC, 1996; JPII, 2000) is hard to strike. Whilst observing improvements over the past years, most participants express a desire for more human formation input, especially in the affective-sexual area. A possible explanation can be that referred to by Cencini (1994a) where shame and immaturity risk shrouding the affective-sexual area which remains unmentionable.

Notwithstanding the mentioned deficiencies, participants attribute a process of inner transformation to several formation opportunities, offered both by their Institute and the Church, as well as life experiences (*Mark: 11,5-6*). This data is in line with studies which contend that a main objective of formation for celibacy is an acquired ability to get in touch with one’s inner world, discover emotional needs (John & Varkay, 2012) and become aware of inner conflicts and emotional immaturities (Rulla et al., 2001; Manenti, 1988; Cencini, 1994).
John shared his experience of how formation challenges authenticity and leads unfaithful members to terminate their vocational commitment (*John: 14,21-22*).

Whilst this might hold true for the majority of the three thousand men and women religious who leave consecrated life annually at a relatively young age (*CICLSAL*, 2013), Sipe (2003) contends that, at any one time, fifty per cent of clergy remain within priesthood and are involved in sexual activity of some sort.

Participants are positive about the added benefits they could receive when they avail themselves of counselling. Resorting to psychological services was important for Mark and John, who wished to deepen self-awareness during challenging times (*Mark: 16,10-13*), (*John: 21,12-14*). In effect, literature mainly suggests counselling as a process of dealing with problematic areas of the personality and difficult periods in the life of the celibate (*Kuttianimattathil et al.* 2012; *Nugent* 2000; *Parapully*, 2012; *Ciarrocchi & Wicks*, 2000). A particular mention is made to the area of sexuality (*Nugent*, 2000).

5.3. *The Experience of Choice, Loss and Mourning*

The “principle of gradualism” (*Coleman*, 2003) which seems to inform the path in the formation process holds for participants’ experiences of renunciation. Participants go through specific encounters during which they are bound to make choices. The act of choosing becomes part of their “learning process”, involving change and transformation (*De Souza*, 2007), and helping with the acquisition of “new coping mechanisms” (*Sipe*, 2003).
For Mark and George, acknowledging the preciousness of the foregone pearls (Chaves, 2006) becomes an important step forward. Challenged and enticed by the possibility of romantic encounters, they seem to allow themselves to get in touch with and discover their own sexuality (Ezeani, 2011), and are able to risk self-disclosure consenting them to share their experiences with the Spiritual Director (John & Varkay, 2012). Whilst specific experiences come to a resolution, participants however understand that this is a lengthy process possibly ‘suffering’ from several regressions. Participants also endure phases when the personal value given to the pearl weakens and choosing celibacy for the Kingdom loses some of its enthralment (Chaves, 2006) (Mark: 14,19-21).

Moreover, Mark’s frequent mention of relinquishments seems to go along with Cencini’s (2010) idea of the “risk zone” and “unsatisfied longings” (p.17). He contends that during these phases, an open and confidential (FSI, 1980; Cencini, 1994a) relationship with the spiritual director coupled with a constant yearning for Christ (De Souza, 2007) kept him within the vocation. Renunciations are not solely experienced in the sexual-affective areas. Participants seem to consume all their energies serving their brethren (Carmen: 10,12-17). Whilst “reaching beyond self” and “serving others productively” are pillars for celibate living (Sipe, 2003, p.38), sacrificing needs for duties is sometimes difficult to bear.

Participants attribute the ability of gaining self-control in the area of sexuality both to their own free will and to the impact of the formation experience (Anna: 2,12-13). Church documents referring to a pedagogy of consecrated chastity encourage an experiential approach seeking to help candidates obtain self-control,
especially in the “sexual and affective level” (FSI, 1980; PI, 1990 p.13). Several authors debate on the matter of self-control in an effort to move away from rigidity and towards a positive approach which still requires education (Chaves, 2006; Chittister, 2000). Nugent (2000) calls this a painstaking yet liberating mission, distancing itself from denial and repression towards a positive channelling of energies.

Becoming deeply engaged in the interview, Anna and Carmen expand on their occasional desire for a loving and caring partner and the loneliness which ensues (Anna: 11,7-9). Carmen explains how she shares on this loss with her spiritual director. Anna encounters difficulty for such confidential sharing (Anna: 12,3-4). Ratios indicate that a main task of formators is to engage with formees on themes regarding intimacy and friendship and encourage the cultivation of fraternal friendships which sustain the celibate’s commitment. This task might not always be achieved. Parappully (2012) and Cencini (2010) contend that in view of the resurgence of sexuality and intimacy needs during the middle years, initial formation programs are meant to deal with this theme. Participants in question are in fact middle-aged and are coming to terms with “the need to share one’s inner life with other persons for whom one cares and, the consequent desire to enter into intimate companionship with such individuals” (Bonnot, 1995, p.20). This constitutes a challenge for the celibate (Bonnot, 1995) “who has renounced the normal path to human intimacy” (Slater, 2012, p.206). However, Slater argues that failing to find an alternate means to human intimacy “would decrease the possibility of reaching full humanness and self-realisation” (p.206). She recommends a profound contemplative prayer life
together with human friendship as a means of nourishing the celibate’s quest for intimacy. This seems to be the participants’ desire.

Participants’ sharing on the loss and grief gone through when renouncing to motherhood and fatherhood, gives the impression that formation and experience lead them to such awareness and teaches them how to go through a grieving process (Nugent, 2000, p.73). Mark’s reflection (Mark: 5,6-10) on his inability to let go of a desire for a romantic relationship with a woman led me to ponder on Freud’s (1917) elaboration of melancholia. Freud seems to refer to the inability to mourn as melancholia. In melancholia “the object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love” (Freud 1917, p.244). As long as there is “a strong fixation to the loved object”, the person is not yet ready to part with this love and from the identification with the lost object (Freud 1917, p.248). The unravelling of the possibility of being stuck in melancholia prohibiting full engagement with mourning was an enthralling revelation in itself. This seems to hold for Mark’s experience and formation possibly led him to this insight.

Mark’s and Anna’s (Mark: 2,7-10) (Anna: 11,14-16) elucidation of the meaning-making process related to an alternative manner of celebrating Valentine’s Day with his ‘lover’, the Lord Jesus, recalls Sipe’s (2003) definition of celibacy stating that “only a love that can match or exceed what is possible with sexual love can sustain celibacy” (p.41).
5.4. Dealing with Ongoing Challenges

“Our sexuality doesn’t know we have a celibate commitment” (Nedungatt, 2012 p.572). This declaration is affirmed by Jane (Jane: 2,5-6). Data from interviews indicates a concern for psychosexual maturity (Mannath, 2012) and an awareness of its “profound and pervasive aspect” (Halperin, as cited in Kuttianimattathil, 2012). Formation has set in motion a desire for participants to get in touch with their bodies and sexual feelings (Ratios; PI, 1990; Sipe, 2003) and helped them understand how consecrated celibacy can be achieved when these sexual urges are steered towards the service of humankind (Sipe, 2003).

The challenge of respecting an intimate friendship within the framework of a fundamental celibate commitment (Slater, 2012) is raised by Carmen and Anna (Carmen: 14,11-14) (Anna: 7,20-21). Whilst positive about the benefits of celibate intimacy, participants possibly “carry the remnants of an undeniable ambivalence in religious communities regarding intimate relationships such as ‘particular friendships’” (Slater, 2012 p.204). Their apprehension seems to concur with studies carried out by Ducho et al. as cited in Slater (2012) who maintain that such concern transpires from “a fear that social intimacy may lead to crossing sexual boundaries” (p.204). Whilst Slater iterates that fearing and fleeing away from loving relationships could become self-destructive, Schneiders (1986) proposes that candidates for celibate living develop the skill of being concurrently open yet sexually self-contained, thus respecting boundaries.
Some participants share on their inability to achieve psychosexual integration, occasionally giving in to their sexual urges (*John 15,24-25; 16,1-3*). This could indicate the possibility of unresolved issues resulting from tasks pertaining to preceding developmental stages not being yet accomplished (Jeyaraj 2012; Cencini, 1994). Sipe (2003) speaks of a widespread difficulty in maintaining a celibate commitment. Whilst the aetiology of difficulties lies not within the merits of this study, Rulla’s (1985) assertion about limitations inherent in human nature and his discovery of an area of limited freedom seems to hold for such hindrances and calls for the need of sufficiently trained formators able to deal with unconscious limitations (Rulla, 1985; Cencini, 1994; Costello, 2007).

Participants seem to portray two ends of a continuum when describing their mission directly linked to a celibate choice - a tendency to become over-worked and the risk of leading a comfortable life (*Carmen: 10,12-17*; *Mark: 3,13-14*) Whilst Church documents stress for a healthy balance (PDV, 1992; FSI, 1980; VC, 1996), an impending challenge perceived by Mark and Carmen concerns what seems to be a lack of value given to the meaning of being a celibate “for the Kingdom” and “serving others productively” (Sipe, 2003, p.38). They are concerned about members becoming self-centred rather than other-centred (Rulla, 1985). This issue raises concern as to the effect formation has on the lived experience of young celibates: whether it is an orientation towards an internalisation of values (Rulla, 1985; Cencini, 1994a) or else risks remaining at the surface. Analogous to literature (Slater, 1996), Carmen believes lack of commitment and responsibility to be culturally related and is concerned about young members contracting modern diseases (*Carmen: 11,1-4*).
Whilst members of Secular Institutes are encouraged to strike a positive relationship with the inherently good nature of the world (Rocchetta, 1994), Church and formation documents do allude to possible pitfalls it presents to consecrated persons (PME, 1947; PI, 1990). A fear of being carried away by values countering a celibate commitment is evident in the interviews. This calls for stronger points of reference within the respective Institutes, as well as renewed formation programs and concurs well with current literature mentioning how the Church has to rediscover its understanding of the vows “in the context of world-consciousness” (Slater 2011, p.281).

5.5. Life as an Important Instructor

FSI (1980) and PI (1990) make explicit allusions to how learning through practical life experiences becomes a leading instrument of formation. PI (1990) specifically mentions the capability of “inventing various possible ways of living them <Constitutions> and making them live” (p.56). Ratios indicate how formation programs possibly activate an inner mechanism serving a two-way process - translating theory into an application for the lived experience and bringing forth the lived experience to be processed during formation sessions. This resonates both with Chaves’ (2006) assertion that formation is an experience and “what counts is not the value of the experience, but the experience of the value to be interiorised and assimilated” (p.13), and Sipe’s (2003) proposition to celibates to make an attempt to dwell on daily experiences. Fiorini (1994) refers to choosing life as the privileged
place where the lay celibate “experiences harmony between spiritual tensions, theoretical notions, sentiments, emotions and vital impulses” (p.168).

Whilst acknowledging the significance of specific life experiences (ex. a missionary experience in a poor country) as strengthening the celibate vocation, I tend to follow that participants refer mostly to daily experiences compelling them to an existential evaluation of their own being in relationship to oneself, the other and the Other. Participants’ understanding of celibacy broadens when, in their relationships with married family members, work colleagues and friends, they opt for a reflexive stance through which their radical choice to follow Christ is challenged by a possibility and a desire for a life-long partner, family and offspring (George: 9,3-6) (Mark: 5,4-6). The result of a comparison with other life options grants for a profound renewal of one’s understanding of the celibate choice (Nugent, 2000). It challenges participants for further learning as well as growth in the ability of internalisation of the vocational values (Rulla, 1985), and possibly enhances their ability of living celibacy in an expressive rather than a repressive manner (Beattie, 2001).

Participants are mindful about how their own willingness to be submerged into the formation process, thus becoming responsible for own growth, constitutes an essential component for an efficacious outcome (Mark: 13,17-18) (Anna: 9,6-7). They feel called to allow themselves into the process (Mannath, 2012; PI, 1990). The positive consequences of a personal effort are outlined in Church documents, the latter focusing on a “responsible freedom” pertaining to the formee (PDV, 1992). Participants have an awareness that a well-planned formation program, whilst granting them a stronger self-identity to ably overcome the several roadblocks to
celibate maturity (Mannath, 2012; Mc Clone, 2009; John & Varkay, 2012), leads them to discover, assimilate and deepen their religious identity (Pl, 1990). Mark (Mark: 9,9-13) conveys how this growth urges him to seek further optional formation opportunities as a means to re-evaluate his life, and encourages him to embrace new responsibilities (De Souza, 1997). However, Anna expressed her difficulty in taking the initiative and asking for help during challenging periods (Anna: 12,3-4). Her weakness might reveal that she is still in the process of learning how to assume attitudes of personal responsibility proposed and modelled by formators (Cencini, 1994a). Cencini (1994a) claims that, frequently, formators seemingly give attention to visible and conscious attitudes only, thus assuming the person free enough to take the necessary actions to work on values and attitudes pertaining to consecrated life.

In their endeavour to link formation to the lived experience, participants are deeply inspired by testimonies of elder members, formators, authors and saints. Their commitment to celibacy is positively challenged by models’ mature, wise and holy characteristics. Mannath (2001) portrays how “celibacy’s charm” is personified in celibate roles models. Literature (Cencini, 1994a; Ezeani, 2011; Kuttianimattathil et al., 2012) depicts how emotionally mature formators become a living witness and an inspiration for formees. Mannath (2012), discussing several helps for psychosexual integration and a happy celibate life, describes having models as one of the greatest helps for growth. He holds the idea that celibacy and marriage are not essentially learnt by reading books but by becoming acquainted with good couples and celibates. Of particular mention is Mark’s heartfelt identification with models who acknowledge and accept limitations inherent in human nature (Mark: 16,22-24).
5.6. **Aids towards Authentic Celibate Living**

The experience of participants in this study portrays how formation and life experiences lead them to identify essential stimulating elements necessary for living celibacy. Their relationship to literature shall be briefly discussed.

Data portrays how intensive discernment processes with formators and spiritual directors as well as familiarity with charism are necessary to strengthen Mark’s, Carmen’s and Anna’s inner conviction of being called to follow God in the celibate life *(Mark: 5,20-22)*. Dynamics created throughout the interviews helped me come in touch with the mystery facet within this special calling so aptly explained in PI (1990), claiming that the Holy Spirit is the active agent working wondrously in the hearts of the called. Participants nurture a desire to allow the formation process help them become better recipients of this call (Rulla et al., 2001). Mirroring Sipe’s (2003) contention about “the connection between martyrdom and celibacy” and giving up one’s life (p.34), Mark nurtures this special meaning when paralleling his celibate living to an act of martyrdom *(Mark: 17,15-16)*.

*Ratios* reiterate that a healthy celibate life depends on the creation of an inner space for prayer. Participants stress that living celibacy necessitates being faithful to prayer times and cultivating a personal relationship with Jesus (Paul VI, 1972; Pironio, 1976), sharing with Him their daily joys and burdens. Mark’s and Jane’s insights during interviews lead them to a realisation described as their principal source of ongoing formation - their profound meeting with Christ *(Mark: 7,11-12) (Jane: 4,10-11)*. This awareness echoes literature reiterating that while formation personnel are
instruments or collaborators in this mission, “God is truly the one who forms through making use of human occasions” (John Paul II, 1984). Intimacy with Christ is the product of years of formation. It goes along with Rizzuto’s (1979) description of a spousal relationship,

“those who are capable of mature religious belief renew their God representation to make it compatible with their emotional, conscious, and unconscious situation, as well as with their cognitive and object-related development. Some people want a more libidinal relationship with their God like that of most great mystics” (p.46).

The formation process possibly leads celibates “called for a relationship with the divine other” (Rulla as cited in Costello, 2002, p.192) to reach such culmination experience.

Another essential element considered indispensable by participants for living celibacy is the appropriate channelling of “the fire inside”, that is, the channelling of the Eros (Rolheiser, 1999, p.4). John accounts for an ongoing maturity process during which earlier fears related to a possible inability of finding the right paths to express love find meaning in his mission with the young (John: 6,11-12). This seems to link with literature considering sublimation a positive mechanism for channelling sexual and affective energies (Nugent, 2000; Sipe, 2003).

It is evident from interviews that, together with formal formation structures, supporting relationships between members are conducive to living celibacy. This signifies the importance of a sound environment within groups of lay consecrated persons (VC, 1996). Participants are particularly heartened or to the contrary by their
relationships with members following same path. This support is specifically mentioned in *Ratios* and literature which promote becoming conscious of the human inclination towards intimacy for an “effective living of the celibate commitment” (Slater, 2011 p.204).

5.7. **Conclusion**

The main themes emerging in chapter four have been discussed and reflected upon in the light of literature findings. The concluding chapter shall delineate the implications and limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

6.1. Introduction

The concluding chapter seeks to summarise the main findings of this study. A reflection on limitations and recommendations for further research will ensue. The final part of the chapter includes a brief discussion of the implications findings have on clinical practice, training and supervision.

6.2. Summary of Key Findings

The intention of this study was to explore meanings and experiences participants have formed regarding the formation they received in relation to their understanding of and living consecrated celibacy in the world. It was hoped that the research would provide insights as to the processes by which such meanings were formed.

It has emerged that given participants' willingness and collaboration, the experience of initial and on-going formation provides a supporting and sustaining structure necessary for celibate living. For participants, living celibacy in the world would not be possible without a sustaining structure. This structure includes both group and individual meetings with formators, as well as meetings with a spiritual director. A particular concern of participants regards their readiness to pronounce their first ‘yes’. A longer initial period of formation has been recommended.
Participants consider spiritual direction a key element in formation. They deem counselling an added help to personal development.

It was further observed that participants wish to be challenged with the possibility of other life choices during the initial formation period. This would make them more aware of what they are renouncing to, and to deepen their understanding of celibacy. It has been found that some participants live with intensity their experience of loss and mourning linked to not having a life-long partner and offspring.

Participants described how formation coupled with life experiences increased their awareness of sexuality and its influences on celibate living. This led them to discuss the importance of healthy relationships with the opposite sex, being however cautious of personal weaknesses and respecting boundaries. Participants expressed their wish for more human formation stances in this regard. They also acknowledged the importance of directing their sexual-affective energies in service towards their brethren.

Participants felt strongly about how, very often, life experiences seem to be the main instructors for celibate living. These normal daily experiences serve as the practical link to formation content, and help in the evolving meaning of celibacy. They also bring forth important life lessons. Participants seemed to gain further strength when looking up to older and wiser celibate persons. It was also noted that they depend on support received from like-minded persons for their celibate living.

Participants repeatedly described how, along with personal encounters with their spiritual director, cultivating a profound relationship with Jesus is a great source of support for celibate living.
6.3. **Limitations of the Study**

In spite of efforts made to carry out a study that would be credible and reliable, it is necessary for the reader to keep a number of limitations in mind.

Like all qualitative research, this study cannot be generalised. Findings from this study are to be considered as indicative rather than treated with certainty. Furthermore, in a qualitative study, the researcher always has a particular attitude towards the exploration of questions (Parker, 2004) and objectivity is viewed as being constructed. As outlined in the Methodology chapter, when taking a contextual constructionist stance I acknowledge that findings in this study are a construction of the participants’ and the researchers’ meanings.

In view of the nature of the topic, I am cognisant of participants’ possible conditioning during the course of the interviews. In spite of securing anonymity, the purpose of the study might have marked the manner in which participants chose to describe their experiences. It is also my impression that participants seemed to differ in the degree of intensity with which they immersed themselves in the interview. While aware that both researcher and participant contributed to the process, I could sense some resistance coming from one participant.

I am also aware that, in some cases, notwithstanding the ‘optional’ manner in which the interview proposal was portrayed to Institutes’ members, participants might have felt compelled by their Superiors to take part in this study. This might have stemmed out of a general inclination to obey Superiors. Participants might also have felt duty-bound to help in a research project benefitting consecrated life.
Another limitation is inherent to the fact that some of the experiences participants allude to belong to the past. Alas, when referring to their initial years in formation, caution has to be made to the fact that in recent years some changes have possibly been registered both as to length of time before pronouncing first ‘yes’ as well as to formation content. This study is mindful that change happens constantly.

6.4. Recommendations for Future Research

This study sought to explore the relevance formation has to living celibacy. The notion of formation holds a broad implication. A narrowing down of the study could prove beneficial. Thus, new research could either focus on initial formation, or on ongoing formation, as well as specific age bands. Some participants fervently shared on how very important implications of living celibacy were discovered through daily and specific life experiences. Therefore, the bearings life experiences have on living celibacy could be another object of study.

Given the frequent mention of formees’ relationship with their formators, the dynamics of the formator-formee relationship could be an object of study. In the present study, participants were considered as recipients of the formation content and process. Another useful study could be an exploration of formators’ perception of the effectiveness of the formation process.

Mannath (2012) explains that together with initial and ongoing formation, family upbringing constitutes the first and highly influential period of formation in the life of the human being. Thus, it would be interesting to study the impact formees’
early years bear on their living celibacy. This study could establish whether and how significant patterns in early childhood leave their mark in early adulthood.

Participants mentioned their perceived benefits when using psychological services. Another area of study could therefore be carried out with celibate persons who have availed of counselling or psychotherapy sessions. The researcher could seek to elucidate the benefits such a relationship has for living celibacy.

6.5. Implications for Training, Practice and Supervision

“What Allen Bergin (1991) says about psychotherapy with the religiously committed client, holds double true in the treatment of clergy; namely, that a “religiosity gap” exists between many clinicians and clients” (Ciarrocchi & Wicks, 2000, p.xi).

Notwithstanding the fact that religiosity seems deeply-rooted in the Maltese population, the above statement could still hold true for Maltese professionals in this field. For this reason, along with the areas of competence covered in counselling programs, the counselling profession might need to explore whether religion is overlooked in training programs, alongside with the possible stereotypes that might be assumed by lecturers, supervisors, and trainees. I tend to agree with Ciarrocchi’s and Wicks’s (2000) belief that “clinical treatment for intensely religious individuals becomes a multicultural issue, in the same way as therapy with any diverse ethnic, racial, or otherwise culturally distinct group” (p.xi). Additionally, ethical training requires that counsellors learn to understand, respect and intervene according to the
cultural context of the client. Professionals with a strong interest in this particular field could benefit from specialised courses as well as literature serving as practical guides for counsellors.

This study revealed that participants who availed themselves of counselling and other psychological services went through a positive experience. Research (Propst et al., 1992) indicates that agnostic clinicians were likewise as effective as counsellors with a religious background in their work with religiously committed persons suffering from depression. Whilst giving weight to the value of this research, I believe that accepting a referral to work with a celibate person calls for a professional commitment to delve into relevant literature which increases awareness of the value and purpose of choosing celibacy for religious convictions.

As regards supervision, my own experience seems to indicate that both religious as well as less religiously-committed professionals could provide important insights as to the dynamics created within the counselling relationship. However, choosing a supervisor with extensive experience in the area of celibacy would possibly provide added benefits.

6.6. Conclusion

In the introductory chapter, I referred to a significant relationship experienced during my early and late adolescent years which was to mould my inner being and effectively inspire my thinking with regard to persons who choose to lead a celibate life for the Kingdom of God. Along the years, other consecrated men and women left
indelible marks. Having explored new grounds with my participants, I am yet in another existential situation.

I now carry their living experiences with a sense of mystery, captured by their strivings to make their self-giving whole. I remain particularly moved by one participant’s account of his incessant struggles and joys, and by his gratitude for having allowed him to revisit important aspects of his life journey throughout the process of the interview. I confess that his and their experiences provoked a reassessment of my motivations and a renewal of my commitment to become more professionally apt to help these persons discover their inner dynamics and better relate to themselves, the other and the Other. I however remain aware that,

“Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand” (Is. 64:8).
APPENDIX 1 - Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Informed consent form

2. Background information:
   - Personal details
   - How did you come to know your Institute?
   - For how many years have you been part of your Institute?
   - When did you profess your vows?

3. Present Dissertation Title to Participant
I shall explain that I am carrying out research on formation for celibacy, specifically on the relationship between formation and living celibacy.

4. Questions
   - What is your understanding of celibacy? What does it mean to you?
   - What do you understand by sexuality? What does it mean to you?
   - Were you aware of what you were renouncing to when you entered consecrated life? What was it specifically?
• During the past years, were there moments when your awareness of renunciation became stronger?

• What sort of feelings did this new awareness provoke in you?

• What does formation mean to you? What feelings were provoked in you during and after formation meetings?

• Did your formation have an effect on your relationship with a) yourself, b) friendship and intimacy with both sexes, and c) the capacity for solitude?

• Do you feel/believe that formation helps you live a celibate life?

• What are your views of celibacy today? Are they the same as at that time?

• What is your relationship with celibacy today? What are your feelings about being celibate today, after so many years?

• Have you ever or do you still encounter difficulties in living celibacy? Could you elaborate on this?

• Were there any crises points in your life when you deemed formation not enough? What helped you during these moments?

• Do you use any tools or resources obtained throughout the years that have been of help in nurturing celibacy?

• Was the experience of your relationship with your formator/s and/or spiritual director significant and beneficial for your living a celibate life? Has it helped you seek help when in need?

• Is/Was professional therapeutic help encouraged and available? If yes, how was/is it experienced?

• Are you a happy in celibate life?
Use probes like, “Can you tell me more about that?” “How did you feel about that?”

5. Thank for participation.
Gwida għall-Intervista

1. Formola tal-kunsens

2. Informazzjoni dwar l-isfond personali:
   - Kif sirt taf bl-Istitut tieghek?
   - Kemm ilek membru ta’/parti minn dan l-Istitut?
   - Meta għamilt il-professjoni?

3. Nippreżenta t-titlu tad-dissertazzjoni lill-partecipant/a
   Nispjega li qed nagħmel riċerka dwar il-formazzjoni għać-ċelibat, b’mod speċifik fuq ir-relazzjoni bejn il-formazzjoni u kif wieħed jghix ħajja ċelebi.

4. Misoqsijiet
   - X’tifhem b’ċelibat? Xi jfisser ghalik iċ-ċelibat?
   - X’tifhem b’sesswalità? Xi tfisser ghalik is-sesswalità?
   - Kont taf ghal xiex qed tirrinunzja meta dħalt fil-hajja kkonsagrata? Xi ħsibt dakinhar li kont qed tirrinunzja ħalih?
   - Matul is-snin li għaddew, kien hemm mumenti meta ħassejt b’mod aktar qawwi s-sens tar-rinunzja?
   - Din l-awareness ġdida tar-rinunzja x’sentimenti qajmet fik?
   - Kif thares lejn il-formazzjoni? X’sentimenti kienu jitqanqlu fik matul u wara l-laqgħat ta’ formazzjoni?
• Il-formazzjoni li rċevejt kellha xi effett fuq a) ir-relazzjoni tiegħek miegħek innifsek, b) il-hhiberija u l-intimità maż-żewġ sessi, u ċ) il-kapaċità li tghix mumenti ta’ waħdek?

• Taħseb/tempmen li l-formazzjoni qed tghinek tghix ħajja ċelibi?

• X’taħseb illum dwar iċ-ċelibat? Ghadek taħseb l-istess bħal qabel?

• Kif thossok qed tghix iċ-ċelibat illum? Wara ħafna snin, liema sentimenti thoss illum fir-rigward taċ-ċelibat?

• Qatt kellek diffikultajiet jew għadek thoss diffikultajiet biex tghix iċ-ċelibat?
  Tista’ tispjega aktar fuq dan?

• Kien hemm mumenti kritiċi f’ħajtek fejn ħassejt li l-formazzjoni li rċevejt ma kienitx biżżejjed? X’kien ta’ ħajjnuna ghalik f’dawn il-mumenti?

• Tagħmel użu minn għodda jew riżorsi li inti ksibt matul is-snin li kienu ta’ ħajjnuna biex tikber/titrawwem fiċ-ċelibat?

• L-esperjenza tar-relazzjoni tiegħek mal-formator/s u/jew mad-direttur spiritwali kienet waħda sinifikanti u ta’ ħajjnuna biex inti tkun tista’ tghix ħajja ċelbi? Għenitek tfittex ħajjnuna meta ħassejt il-bżonn?

• L-ħajjnuna terapewtika professjonji hi/kienet inkuraġġita? Kien hemm din l-ħajjnuna available? Jekk iva, kif esperjenzajtha/qed tesperjenzaha?

• Thossok ferħan/a bħala persuna ċelibi?

Aġħmel mistoqsijiet bħal, “Tista’ tgħidli aktar dwar din il-ħaġa?” “Kif ħassejtek?”

5. Grazzi tal-partecipazzjoni tiegħek.
APPENDIX 2 - Informed Consent Form

The relevance of religious formation to celibate living - a psychosexual analysis of lay consecrated persons.

This interview is being conducted to collect data for a research dissertation, and in partial fulfilment of MCouns degree at the University of Malta. The aim of the research is to explore the meaning and experience of formation for celibacy for lay consecrated persons.

By signing this form, I agree that:

1. Any audio recordings made during my interview with the researcher Dorienne Portelli may be used and included in the writing of a Master Dissertation;

2. My identity will be protected and not revealed throughout the production of the dissertation or any subsequent related publications. Any details which can lead to my identification as a participant in this research are to be changed;

3. Transcripts and recordings are to be destroyed as soon as the dissertation is completed. Apart from the researcher, the only persons who can have access to the data are the research supervisor and advisor, who are also bound by confidentiality;

4. I have the right to withdraw my participation in the interview and research process at any time, without having to give a reason for my decision. I have the option not to answer particular questions, which could lead to the ending of my participation in the research.

5. Conclusions from this research will be communicated to participants either verbally or in writing should these be requested.

I have read and understood the above information and agree to participate in the research.
Signed: _______________________
Date: _______________________

Name (print): _________________________________________________________

Phone no: _______________________
Email: _______________________

Age: ________________

Employment details: ____________________________________________________

Researcher: Dorienne Portelli

Email address:

Phone No:

Research Supervisor: Dr Fr Paul Galea

Advisor: Dr Claudia Psaila
Formola tal-Kunsens

Ir-rilevanza tal-formazzjoni religjuża għall-ħajja ċelibi - analiżi psikosesswali tal-lajċi kkonsagrati.

Din l-intervista qed issir biex tingabar informazzjoni għal dissertazzjoni ta’ riċerka u bħala twettiq parżali għal degree ta’ MCouns fl-Università ta’ Malta.

L-iskop ta’ din ir-ričerka hu biex wieħed jifhem aktar it-tifsir u l-esperjenza tal-formazzjoni għaċ-ċelibat għal-lajċi kkonsagrati.

Meta qed niffirma din il-formola, jiena naqbel li:
1. Kwalsijasi awdjo rikordings li jsiru matul l-intervista tiegħi mar-ričerkatriċi Dorienne Portelli jistgħu jintużaw u jiġu inklużi fil-kitba ta’ dissertazzjoni għal Master;
2. L-identità tiegħi se tiġi mħarsa u ma tkunx żvelata/miċxux la tul il-produzzjoni tad-dissertazzjoni u lanqas f’pubblikazzjonijiet li jistgħu jsiru wara. Kwalsijasi dettal li jista’ jwassal għall-identifikazzjoni tiegħi bħala parteċipant/a f’din ir-ričerka għandu jiġi mibdul;
3. Traskrizzjonijiet u rekordings għandhom jiġu meqruda hekk kif id-dissertazzjoni tkun kompluta. Minbarra r-ričerkatriċi, l-uniċi persuni li jista’ jkollhom aċċess għal din l-informazzjoni huma r-research supervisor u l-advisor, li wkoll huma marbuta bil-kunfidenzjalità;
5. Il-konklużjonijiet minn din ir-ričerka jiġu kkomunikati lill-partecipanti jew bil-fomm jew bil-kitba jekk dan ikun mitlub.
Jiena qrajt u fhimt l-informazzjoni ta’ hawn fuq u naqbel li nipparteċipa f’din ir-riċerka.

Iffirmata: ___________________________  Data: ___________________________
Isem: ___________________________________________________________________
Numru tat-telefon: ________________  Email: __________________________
Età:________________
Dettalji tax-xogħol: _____________________________________________________

Riċerkatriċi: Dorienne Portelli
Indirizz email:
Numru tat-telefon:

Research Supervisor: Dr Fr Paul Galea
Advisor: Dr Claudia Psaila
APPENDIX 3 - Letter of Invitation to Institutes

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am currently reading my final year in a Master Degree Course in Counselling at the University of Malta, and am working on my dissertation on the relevance of religious formation to celibate living. I would like to invite members of your Institute in the thirty-five fifty-five age bracket to participate in this research.

I intend to engage in this research process hoping to gain knowledge and understanding on whether and how the initial and ongoing religious formation processes helped the research participants become aware of and get in touch with their own sexual being.

More specifically, I wish to elicit whether and how:

• the initial formation process helps candidates delve deeper within the self, possibly giving consideration to affective and sexual issues;
• formation is relevant to their day-to-day lived experiences;
• participants feel that formation forarms and strengthens the person against any possible crises faced in subsequent developmental stages;
• participants' experience of their relationship with their formator/s was/is significant;
• professional therapeutic help was/is encouraged and available, and how it was/is experienced.
Should this proposal be accepted, I would appreciate that I have access to both your initial and ongoing formation program. This would help with my literature review.

Participants will take part in in-depth interviews of about one hour. For ethical purposes, the identities of participating Institutes and participants will not be revealed throughout the dissertation. Furthermore, participants have the right to withdraw from participation in the interview and research process at any time, without giving a reason for decision.

While thanking you in advance, I look forward to hear from you.

Yours sincerely,

Dorienne Portelli

Master in Counselling, Trainee
Għażiż Membru Responsabbli,

Permezz ta’ din l-email nixtieq nistaqsi dwar il-possibbiltà li membri tal-Istitut tagħkom li ghandhom bejn hamsa u tletin u hamsa u hamsin sena jipparteċipaw fid-dissertation li qed nagħmel bħala parti mill-istudji tieghi tal-M.Couns. fl-Università ta’ Malta.


Permezz ta’ din ir-riċerka nittama li nikseb tagħrif u nifhem aktar jekk u kif il-proċessi ta’ formazzjoni religjuża, kemm tal-bidu kif ukoll il-formazzjoni kontinwata, kienu ta’ ġhajnuna għall-partecipanti f’din ir-ričerka biex isiru aktar konxji u jiġu f’kuntatt akbar mas-sesswalità tagħhom.

Għaldaqstant, nixtieq nistaqsi jekk u kif:

- il-proċess ta’ formazzjoni inizjali jghin il-kandidati jinżlu aktar fil-fond tagħhom infushom, possibbilment biex jirriflettu fuq il-kwistjonijiet ta’ natura affettiva u sesswali;
- il-formazzjoni ghandha rilevanza għall-ħajja u l-esperjenzi ta’ kuljum;
Il-partecipanti jhossu li l-formazzjoni tipprepara u ssahħah il-persuna kontra l-kriżijiet li wieħed jista’ jghaddi minnhom matul il-fażijiet tal-iżvilupp tal-ħajja;

kemm kienet jew kemm hi sinifikanti l-esperjenza li l-partecipanti kellhom mal-persuni li għenuhom fil-formazzjoni tagħhom;

kienex/hix imħeġġa u kienx hemm/hemmx possibbiltà ta’ għajnuna terapewtika professjonali, u x’kienet/x’inhi l-esperjenza dwarha.


Grazzi talli għoġbok taqra din l-ittra. Nistenna minn għandek

Nibqa’ grata,

Dorienne Portelli
APPENDIX 4 - An Excerpt from the Process Notes

What follows is a copy of the process notes written after the pilot interview. These are being presented as recorded after the interview.

Process Notes

I sense relief, as well as a surge of emotion. I have managed to go through the experience of my first interview. Am remarkably touched by the participant’s wish and ability to share his experience. I was not expecting him to go to such depths, and it felt as if I was being allowed to thread on sacred ground. His openness and authenticity helped me connect with him. I am honoured to have witnessed his experience. It is as if a therapeutic relationship has come into effect within an hour and a half. My fear and anxiety regarding a possible inability to connect with the participant are now alleviated. He seems to be a gift to my study.

Soon after the formal initial briefing, the participant switched to an experiential mode with a felt insistence on sharing his life experience. I stayed with him and followed him through the process during which he led me wherever he deemed important. I, however, kept a focus on the research question.

As from the beginning of the interview, the participant was willing to share his joys and struggles of living celibacy. He also shared on how formation as well as lived experiences impacted him. He spent time thinking and formulating his narrative in a manner which mirrored his reflexive abilities. On one particular instance, I intervened
thinking I could proceed with another question. He asked me to postpone the question since he had more to say on the previous issue. I was surprised. He was deeply immersed in the interview, while I was still captured by anxiety.

His sharing on the manner of experiencing losses when choosing celibacy, gave me a feeling of a human being in touch with his inner self. It felt as if his whole being was being shared, without inhibitions. He expanded on an inner struggle linked to not having a woman with whom to share his life. Concurrently he tried to make meaning of his experiences of loss by striving to work on His relationship with Christ. He shared on how battles are not only linked to a sexual nature. Leading a comfortable life instead of being fully of service to mankind is another enticement.

The participant shared on how both the formal formation structures as well as the relationships with the other members of his Institute helped him along the way. He believes formation has left an indelible impact on his personality, slowly and progressively changing him from a timid young man to a person able to face difficult situations.

As an adult, the participant holds himself responsible for own formation. He shared on how willingness to ask for help and to look for new formation possibilities is of utmost importance. He values several experiences of human formation he availed of outside the structure of his Institute. He treasures his relationship with the spiritual director as being the most important form of support for celibate living. He resorts to spiritual direction frequently, especially when challenged by sexual and affective matters.
A source of great support and inspiration for his living celibacy are the living testimonials of elder members of his group. He also connects to deceased members in prayer and asks them to intercede for his wellbeing.

I now feel captured by his strong presence during the interview. Several phrases are echoing whilst I am writing this reflection. I feel ‘engaged with’ his process of reflexivity and with the manner in which he generated meanings of his formation and life experiences. It seems that I have now acquired some understanding of the role of the researcher.
In this appendix I will portray how themes were elicited from the data gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews (Smith and Eatough, 2007).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Master Themes</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Initial Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The experience of choice, loss and mourning.</td>
<td>Loss of a romantic relationship.</td>
<td>I obviously felt that I couldn’t have a girlfriend.</td>
<td>Renouncing to a special relationship with a woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with ongoing challenges.</td>
<td>Challenges linked to sexuality.</td>
<td>And I think that, in the early twenties, that is strongly felt, because of lack of experience.</td>
<td>Intensity of emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life as an Important Instructor.</td>
<td>Formation to be grounded in experience</td>
<td>Formation would not be as mature as it is now. I think that emotions would be much stronger. I dare say that I think that is the highest price I have paid.</td>
<td>The importance of learning through experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Institution as a Forming and a Sustaining Structure.</td>
<td>Possible inadequacy of initial formation in dealing with loss.</td>
<td>Initial formation does not seem to suffice for this renunciation.</td>
<td>Acknowledging affective and sexual feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience of choice, loss and mourning.</td>
<td>Experience of loss coloured by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience of choice, loss and mourning.</td>
<td>particular stage in life.</td>
<td>Then, in your late twenties, you start missing a companion. The companionship of a partner, that you do not have. But thank God, in our group I have always found persons who understood and loved me. Very good friends.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aids towards authentic celibate living.</td>
<td>Loss of companionship.</td>
<td>A positive compensation through valued relationships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Institution as a Forming and a Sustaining Structure.</td>
<td>A wish to share life with a woman. A feeling of something missing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aids towards authentic celibate living.</td>
<td>Sublimation of paternal instinct.</td>
<td>Difficulties overcome through good relationships with same-minded persons. Love and understanding are experienced in this manner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings of maturity and achievement linked to a better way of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience of choice, loss and mourning.</td>
<td>Channelling of sexual energies.</td>
<td>exploited my paternal instinct in the care of children entrusted to me. This also helped in the sphere of my sexuality.</td>
<td>dealing with children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with ongoing challenges.</td>
<td>The experience of loss linked to particular experiences.</td>
<td>These last years, there were particular moments when the feeling of renunciation was more challenging. I felt it many times, and in a strong way, and I don’t know how I managed to remain in the Institute. At times, the feeling of loss was very very strong.</td>
<td>A feeling of an ongoing struggle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relentless vocational challenges.</td>
<td>Seemingly going through a mourning process.</td>
<td>Strong feelings of loss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experiencing loss and mourning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 6 - Verbatim Quotes referred to in Chapter 5

“It has helped me a lot and sometimes I felt that it would be my last session, since I was about to stop in the face of current challenges, but then after Direction, I would feel changed, consoled that things were much better.” (Mark)

“Għenni ħafna u ġieli ħassejtni se mmur għall-aḥħar sessjoni għax kont se nieqaf minħabba l-ifiđi li kont qed inġarrab, u noħroġ mid-Direzzjoni mibdul, ikkunslat ħafna li l-affarijiet ikunu qagħdu ħafna”. (Mark: 12,9-12)

“I don’t think that in the beginning you understand what you are leaving behind ... You understand what you are doing, it is not that you don’t understand... but rather you don’t grasp the full consequence of your choice.” (Jane)

“Ma naħsibx li tifhem għall-ewwel x’se thalli ...Tkun tifhem x’se tagħmel, mhux ma tifhimx, ta... Imma lanqas tifhem kollox x’se jgħaddi minn għalik”. (Jane: 2,18-20;2,1)

“That is, I put my fears aside, and my false self-perceptions, and I overcome my low self-esteem.” (Mark)

“Jiġifieri neħħejt il-biżghat fil-ġenb, warrabt il-perċezzjonjiet foloz kif inhares lejja nnifsi, u negħleb is-self-esteem dġħajjef”. (Mark: 11,5-6)

“Because the formation we are receiving enables you to be honest, and even with yourself. I thus cannot be insincere.” (John)
“Għax it-tip ta’ formazzjoni li qed nirċievu twasslek biex tkun onest, u anke miegħek innifsek. Mela jiena ma nistax inkun faċċjol.” (John: 14,21-22)

“It brought to light several issues. ... At first, I was very sceptical... Later, after going through it and discovering in depth who I truly am... I received help to be able to address issues which I was previously unaware of ... And I feel that this really helped me address my human weaknesses.” (Mark)

“dak tella’ ħafna affarijiet fil-wiċċ... Għall-bidu kont xettiku ħafna...Wara li għamiltu u skoprejt fil-profond min jien... irċevejt għajnuna sabiex nindirizza l-affarijiet li kien hemm, u ma kontx konxju taghhom... U nnoss illi dan kien għenni ħafna biex nindirizza dawn id-dghufijiet umani fija”. (Mark: 16,10-13)

“I strongly believe, one hundred percent, even because I have experienced it. I experienced it after my mother’s death. I experienced it both because of mummy, I used to go to counselling, and things like this.” (John)


“Why do I keep on going through this great stress? Every day, invariably. These thoughts, I remember well, were worrying me a lot and breaking me…” (Mark)

C: “it isn’t so easy to cope with work, with pastoral activity and at home… That is, at work I have a particular responsibility, here I have a different responsibility…”

D: “It means, then, that you are at home on Saturdays only.”

C: Exactly. Hmm, that is, it is a challenge… and I think that if you are committed… I think that you will be totally immersed.” (Carmen)

C: “biex tlahhaq max-xogħol, mal-appostolat u mad-dar mhix daqshekk faċli… Jiġifieri… ix-xogħol ghandi responsabbiltà mod, hawn ghandi responsabbiltà mod iehor…

D: Jiġifieri s-Sibt biss tkun id-dar inti.

C: Eżattament. Hemm, jiġifieri it is a challenge… u naħseb jekk inti tkun committed… naħseb tkun aktar bla nifs… (Carmen: 10,12-17).

“and I think that you have to exert self control, because desires are normally felt… and the formation that you received helps you too.” (Anna)

“u naħseb trid tkun minnek inti li tikkontrolla wkoll, għax jiġuk xewqat, normali… U anke l-formazzjoni li tkun ħadħ ta tghinek ukoll”. (Anna: 2,12-13)

“for example, at the moment, at work there is a widow who is in a relationship with someone, and you see that the relationship is good, they care for each other, … and you feel these things…” (Anna)

“fuq ix-xogħol, per eżempju, bħalissa hemm xi ħadd li hija armla, imma qieghda in a relationship ma’ xi ħadd, u inti tara li r-relazzjoni hija tajba, caring, u thosshom dawn l-affarijiet…” (Anna: 11,7-9)
“This is a weakness of mine, I tend to remain passive for some time, then when I feel that the crisis is a bit heavy, I then seek help.” (Anna)

“Hija xi haża jiena nhoss naqra difett fiża, noqghod lura, qisu x’hin inħossni li l-kriża tkun kibret naqra sew imbagħad qisni nfittex l-ġħajnuna…” (Anna: 12,3-4)

“Maybe I was not able to take a personal stand and say ‘This is the price I have to pay.’ I found it very difficult. Maybe unconsciously I didn’t want to do it, to admit that, ‘Look, having a girlfriend is not my calling, but I am called for celibacy’.” (Mark)


“For example, it was Valentine’s Day. Some were with their partner, with their husband, and I went to the chapel and spent more time there, or in front of the sacrament, for I have offered myself to him.” (Anna)

“Issa peż. kien il-valentine’s day. Min kien qieghed mal-kumpann tieghu, marraġel, u jiena mort u ghaddejt aktar hin f’kappella, jew quddiem is-sagrament, ġhax jiena lilu tajt lili nnifsi...” (Anna: 11,14-16)

“Our inner instincts... whether you are lay or a consecrated person, you are always going to get these feelings.” (Jane)
“L-istinti li għandha ġewwa fina... kemm ‘k inti lajk, kemm jekk int reliġjuż... xorta se thosshom dawn l-affarijiet...” (Jane: 2,5-6)

“we support each other even in difficult moments. Why not! But then you have to be mature enough not to cross boundaries. But I see nothing wrong in having certain friendships, I think it is healthy...” (Carmen)

“anke f’mumenti iebsin, li nissapportjaw lil xulxin. Why not! Imma mbaghad trid tuża l-maturità tieghek u toqghod attenta ma jkunx hemm kunfidenzi żejda, u hekk. Imma ma nara xejn ħażin li inti jkollok ċerti ħbiberiji... naraha healthy jiena...” (Carmen: 14,11-14)

“I think it is healthy. Then it depends on you, I think, you have to be strong, you know, knowing how to behave in the several relationships.” (Anna)

“Naħseb hija healthy. Imbaghad jien taf x’ngħid dan irid jiġi minnek, inti trid tkun soda biżżejjed, qed tifhem, taf kif ġhandek taġixxi mad-diversi relazzjonijiet”. (Anna: 7,20-21)

“there are times when you feel down. When nothing seems to fare well... Either because of health, or a disaster... you decrease prayer time. Once you do not give time for this relationship, you are prone to fall and I shall use the word which confessors use, well those who confess, it is a fight.” (John)

“jiġu mumenti fejn inti tkun down. Meta l-affarijiet jiġi kollox kontra... Meta jew minħabba s-saħħa, minħabba diżastru... tnaqqas it-talb. La darba tnaqqas din ir-
relazzjoni, inti suxxettibli biex taqa’ u ħa nuża l-kelma li jużaw xi konfessuri, dawn li jqarru nsomma, li hi ġlieda.” (John 15,24-25; 16,1-3)

“instead of being celibate, you end up being single - a bachelor who lives life in a comfortable manner.” (Mark)

“minflok ċelibi tispiċċa għażeb - ġuvni li tghix il-ħajja b’mod komdu għalik.” (Mark: 3,13-14)

C: “it isn’t so easy to cope with work, with pastoral activity and with home... That is... at work I have a particular responsibility, here I have a different responsibility...

D: “It means, then, that you are at home only on Saturdays.”

C: Exactly. Hmm, that is, it is a challenge... and I think that if your are committed... I think that you will be totally occupied.” (Carmen)

C: “biex tlahħaq max-xoġol, mal-appostolat u mad-dar mhix daqshekk faċli...

Ijifieri... ix-xoġol għandi responsabbiltà mod, hawn għandi responsabbiltà mod iehor...

D: Ijifieri s-Sibt biss tkun id-dar inti.

C: Eżattament. Hemm, iġifieri it is a challenge... u naħseb jekk inti tkun committed... naħseb tkun aktar bla nifs... (Carmen: 10,12-17).

“sometimes I talk to sisters my age, and we observe that those younger than us, in their 20’s, I cannot obviously generalise, but I think that there are some of our sisters
who could do more apostolate, and they are not so committed... I think culture doesn’t help... (Carmen)

“anke ġieli nitkellem ma’ sħabi ta’ impari, josservaw illi shabna li huma iżgħar minna, fuq it-20’s, ma nistax niġġeneralizza ta’ jiġifieri, imma naħseb li ghandna sħabna li jistgħu jagħtu iżjed fl-appostolat u they are not committed daqshekk... Il-kultura ma naħsibx li qed tgħin daqshekk... (Carmen: 11,1-4)

“there were times when a woman at University talked to me in a certain way... wanting to start a relationship... I realised... but I was always of a particular personality, of course, we can definitely be friends, but only a friendship, that’s all.” (George)

“kien hemm mumenti meta tfajla l-Università tkellmek u tkellmek f’ċertu livell ta’... li tixtieq tibda’ relazzjoni... tinduna hux... imma dejjem kont ta’ ċerta personalità, mela le, ħbiberija bil-qalb kollha, imma s’hemm naslu.” (George: 9,3-6)

“There were several instances, and with great intensity, and I don’t know how I managed to keep going till now as part of this Institute. There were some intense moments when I felt that I was missing out on too much...” (Mark)

“Kien hemm ħafna drabi u b’mod qawwi ħafna, u ma nafx kif irnexxieli nkompli s’issa li nghix f’dan l-Istitut. Kien hemm mumenti qawwija ħafna fejn ħassejtni qed nitlef ħafna...” (Mark: 5,4-6)
“But not unless I have done my effort. The effort is an integral part of the package.”
(Mark)

“Imma mhux wara li nkun għamilt l-isforz tiegħi. L-isforz huwa parti integrali mill-pakkett”. (Mark: 13,17-18)

“These are opportunities that you have to seek, they are there but you have to avail yourself of them, no one is going to tell you what to do.” (Anna)

“Dawn huma li trid tfittixhom inti, qed tifhem, qegħdin hemm imma inti trid tfittixhom, ħadd mhu se jiġi jgħidlek, ‘isma’, mur aġħmel hekk’…” (Anna: 9,6-7)

“I received a lot of help from the various courses I participated in - sensitivity training, the help of a counsellor... seminars about human relationships, about assertive feedback.” (Mark)

“għenuni ħafna d-diversi korsijiet li ħadt - sensitivity training, għajnuna ta’ counsellour... seminars fuq relazzjonijiet umani, fuq feedback assertiv”. (Mark: 9,9-13)

“This is a weakness of mine, I tend to remain passive for some time, then when I feel that the crisis is a bit heavy, I then seek help.” (Anna)

“Hija xi ħaġa jiena nħoss naqra difett fija, noqghod lura, qisu x’hin inħossni li l-kriżi tkun kibret naqra sew imbagħad qisni nfittex l-ghajnuna...” (Anna: 12,3-4)
“According to Nouwen, the common factor that unites us is human frailty. This helps us to understand each other. Our fragility is not our destruction but it is the characteristic that makes us more human.”  (Mark)


“There is the fact that I know that Jesus called me. The fact that I know for sure that Mark is Mark, and the true Mark is there and my true freedom is there and I feel it, when I think and realise that I was called by Jesus for this style of life.”  (Mark)

“Hemm il-fatt li naf li Ġesù sejjahli. Il-fatt illi naf illi profondament Mark ikun Mark u l-vera Mark johrog u l-vera libertà tieghi tkun hemm u nhossja, meta naħseb u meta nagħraf li jiena msejjah minn Ġesù għal din l-istil ta’ ħajja li qed nghix”.
(Mark: 5,20-22)

“I think that during moments when I felt it impossible to live celibacy, I used to say: ‘This is my martyrdom’. I think that gave me the necessary strength.”  (Mark)


“I believe that formation, I received the most important formation lesson when I realised that Jesus called me.”  (Mark)
“Naħseb jien, il-formazzjoni, l-ikbar formazzjoni, rċevejtha meta rrealizzajt illi Ġesù sejjaħli.” (Mark: 7,11-12)

“there has to be a time when you draw apart to work on yourself in the light of Christ...” (Jane)

“Irid ikun hemm ċertu żminijiet fejn tinqata’ ftit biex tifforma lilek innifsek quddiem Kristu...” (Jane: 4,10-11)

“I cannot say that I am not able to give what I was afraid of not being able to give, that is love.” (John)

“ma nistax nghid li m’iniex qed nagħti dak li kont nibża’ li m’iniex se nagħti, jiġifieri, l-imħabba”. (John: 6,11-12)
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NAME AND SURNAME: DORIENNE PORTELLI

THESIS WORKING TITLE: THE RELEVANCE OF RELIGIOUS FORMATION TO CELIBATE LIVING - A PSYCHOSEXUAL ANALYSIS OF LAY CONSECRATED PERSONS

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